Greed, Analytics and the Mortgage Meltdown: **How could an industry with the best analytic tools fail to see the housing market's collapse?** PAGE 42

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Tales From the Hot Seat

IT pros tell how to ace an interview.

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SEPTEMBER 24, 2007
VOL. 41, NO. 39 $5/COPY

News Analysis

Some IT managers are keeping virtualization projects under wraps to avoid vendor and user pushback.

Microsoft says the days of five-year development cycles for SQL Server are history.

The Grill: Stuart Scott describes what it's like to be the CIO at Microsoft.

Opinion

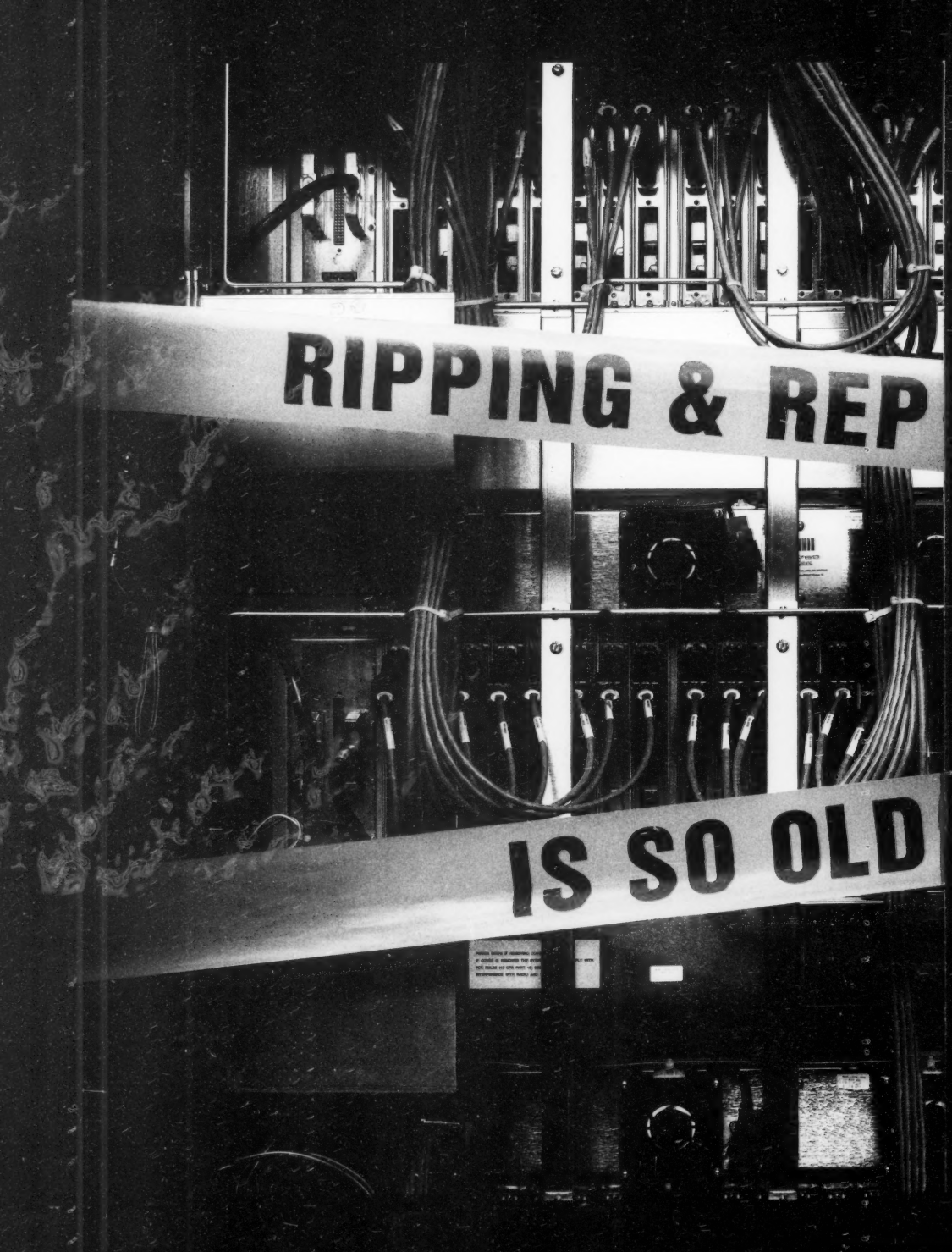
System specs that are just a blur of words do little more than confuse. Five diagrams are better.

Careers

Check out some odd IT job titles in use today, as well as predictions for 2020.

Don't Miss . . .

Ten legal risks of corporate blogging.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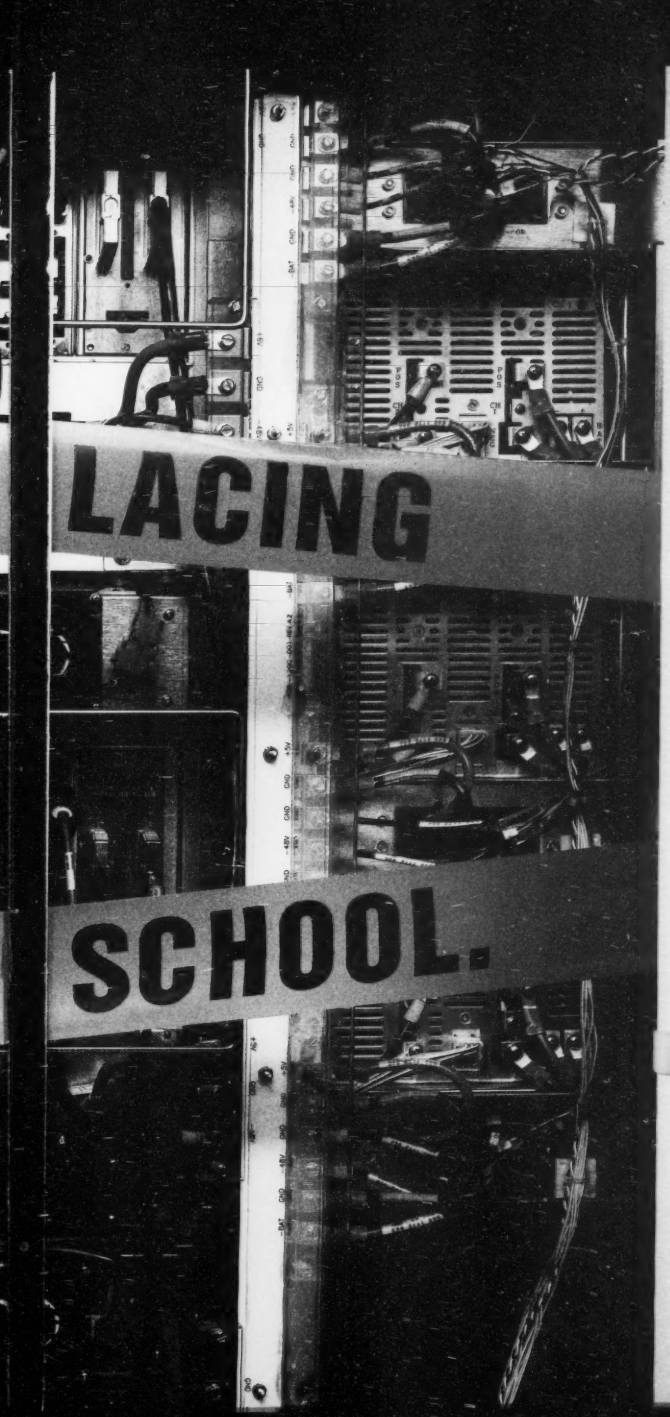

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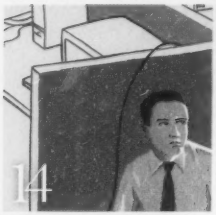

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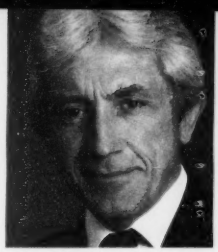
■ EDITOR'S NOTE

Don Tennant

Sweet Irony



"CHINESE STUDENT sues Microsoft over WGA." The moment I read that headline, I knew what to expect. ■ The story, posted on our Web site on Sept. 17, had so far elicited five reader comments. I was certain of what I would find in at least one of them.

I scrolled down, and sure enough, there it was: "Does anyone NOT see the irony in this article?" Mike91163 asked. "China, the world's largest manufacturer/home of pirated software, knock-off products, and poor manufacturing (poisoned dog food, lead paint in children's toys), griping about privacy and spyware?" The comment earned a rating of five thumbs up from other readers.

So, "China" was griping about privacy and spyware. Really? Is that what the story was about?

No, Mike91163, it wasn't. The story was about a university student in Beijing who was griping about privacy and spyware. The student, Lu Feng, is suing Microsoft, claiming that its Windows Genuine Advantage antipiracy software violated his privacy and the security of his PC.

Yet in this reader's mind — and in the minds of many others, I suspect — a single Chinese university student somehow became synonymous with a nation of 1.3 billion people.

It amazes me how pervasive that nonsensical leap is. It's been made right here at *Computerworld*. I can think of at least two instances in which I've had to correct a story's headline because the word *China* was used in reference to entities located in China.

Many of us in the U.S., it seems, have a tendency to distance ourselves from China by depersonalizing anything Chinese and morphing it into the cold face of an alien monolith. That tendency was disturbingly evident in another reader comment about the same story.

"Whatever happened to the good ol' China we used to know?" this reader asked. "The one where they had the right . . . to get run over by a tank." Perhaps the reader thought his reference to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre was humorous. Perhaps others did, too, given that the comment earned a rating of three thumbs up.

■ A single Chinese university student somehow became synonymous with a nation of 1.3 billion people.

He might not have thought so if he had shared my experience the night those tanks rumbled in. I was living in Macau, the former Portuguese enclave on the coast of China near Hong Kong. I saw tears streaming down the cheeks of my Chinese friends as they watched those horrifying images on TV. "China" wasn't some faceless entity. "China" was the tear-stained faces of real people.

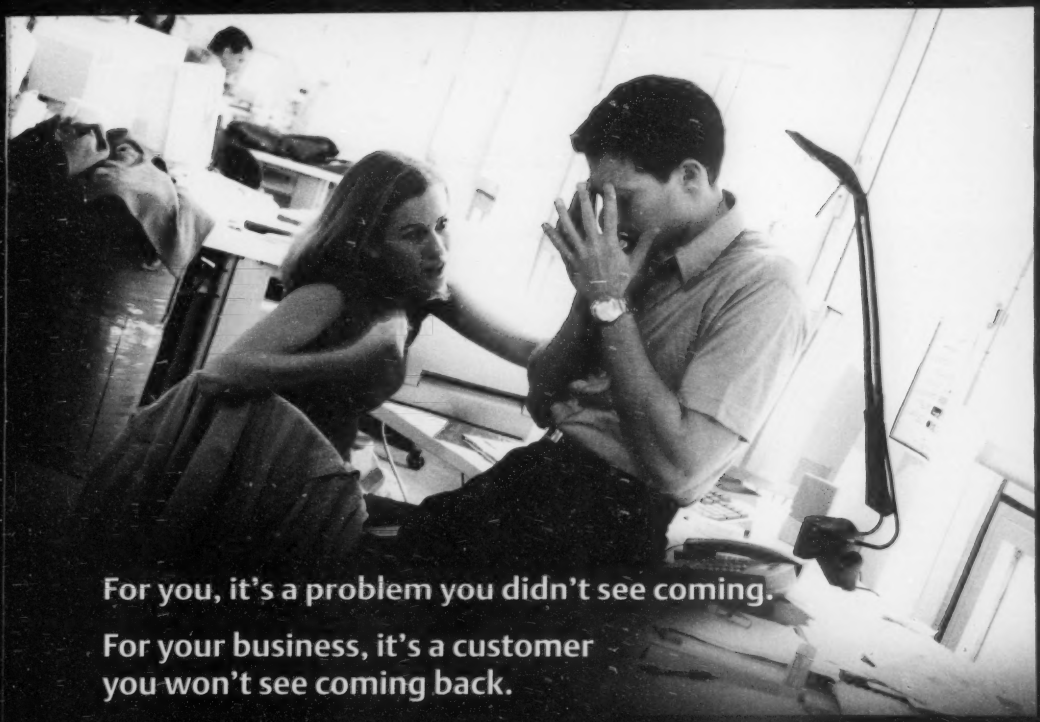
But let's get back to the matter of privacy, and to the irony inherent in Lu's complaint. Mike91163 included this observation in his comment: "Mr. Lu . . . lives in communist China. Residents of the 'People's Republic' HAVE no privacy anyway!"

Mike91163 is right. The residents of China lack many of the rights that we take for granted. Concepts such as the right to protect your personal information and the right to keep what you do with your computer private are hardly familiar ones in China. So how did it even occur to Lu to stand up for his right to privacy? Was he taught that idea at Beijing Public School No. 63? Did he see Chinese leaders on TV advocating privacy protections and guaranteeing that the information on his computer is inviolable?

Not exactly. Lu learned of those concepts from countries like ours. His government controls news organizations, censors search results and blocks Web sites. But because freedom-loving countries have engaged China the way they have, enough information has gotten through to open the minds of China's citizens to concepts that might otherwise elude them. That's why it's so crucial that we stop equating anyone or anything from that country with the distant, amorphous mass we call "China." Otherwise, we're senselessly, needlessly undermining the sort of engagement on which the free flow of information depends.

Does anyone not see the irony in a U.S. company being sued by a student in China over a privacy issue? No, we all see it. It's just that some of us see it as a sweet irony. ■

Don Tennant *is editor in chief of* Computerworld. *Contact him at don_tennant@computerworld.com.*



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LETTERS

Wang's Legacy

I just wanted to write and thank Don Tennant for his editorial supporting Sanjay Kumar ["Dear Charles," Editor's Note, Aug. 20]. I worked for CA for almost 10 years and left about the time Sanjay was being groomed to succeed. Unfortunately, he was really being groomed to fail. Charles Wang is a good entrepreneur and knows how to build a world-class company. Unfortunately, he also built what could be a prime business-school case study of how power corrupts.

■ **Dennis A. Dargel,** *senior security specialist, PepsiCo, Chicago*

I applaud Tennant for writing an editorial that held no punches. In this world where political correctness has reached a sickening level, it was refreshing to see someone simply speak his mind.

■ **Mark Donadio,** *Maywood, N.J., mark@donadio.us*

What Makes a Citizen

I understand what the guy meant who said that a naturalization ceremony doesn't automatically make someone an American, as mentioned in Don Tennant's "Defying Expectations" Editor's Note of Aug. 27. I thoroughly disagree with him, but I understand him. He's pointing out that being American is a cultural thing. We have certain attitudes about freedom, privacy, the place of government in our lives and a whole spectrum of other tidbits that make up a cultural framework and marks us distinctly as those who grew up in the U.S.

Yet Tennant's point is well taken. Someone who takes that oath is as much of an American as that idiot who made the disclaimer in the first place — with as much right to make stupid, outlandish statements.

■ **John A.M. Darnell,** *software developer, Brookfield, Mo., johnamdarnell@gmail.com*

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Get a Life: 10 Steps Toward Better Work/Life Balance
We all know 60-hour workweeks are common in IT, but it doesn't have to be that way.
computerworld.com/careers

Microsoft Downplays User Concerns Over Stealth Update
Windows must silently modify its Update feature to ensure that users are protected, the company says.
computerworld.com/software

Yahoo's New IT Approach: Less Heroism, Fewer Burnouts
The company is using IT service management to improve performance and reduce recurring problems.
computerworld.com/servers

Increasing Adoption of ITIL Is Making Resistance Futile
There is strong resistance to the IT infrastructure Library guidelines inside many IT departments. But use of ITIL is spreading quickly as employers seek uniform and standardized processes.
computerworld.com/servers

Hands On: Getting Down to iWork '08
Can Apple make even a spreadsheet cool? Our reviewer examines the new office productivity suite for the Mac.
computerworld.com/software

Six Signs That It's Time to Move On
Katherine Spencer Lee describes some signals that it may be time to leave your mediocre job behind to look for greener pastures.
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Opinion: Keeping Encrypted Data Encrypted
For encrypted data to stay safe in all of its various forms, users must take some additional security precautions. Jerome Wendt offers a few tips.
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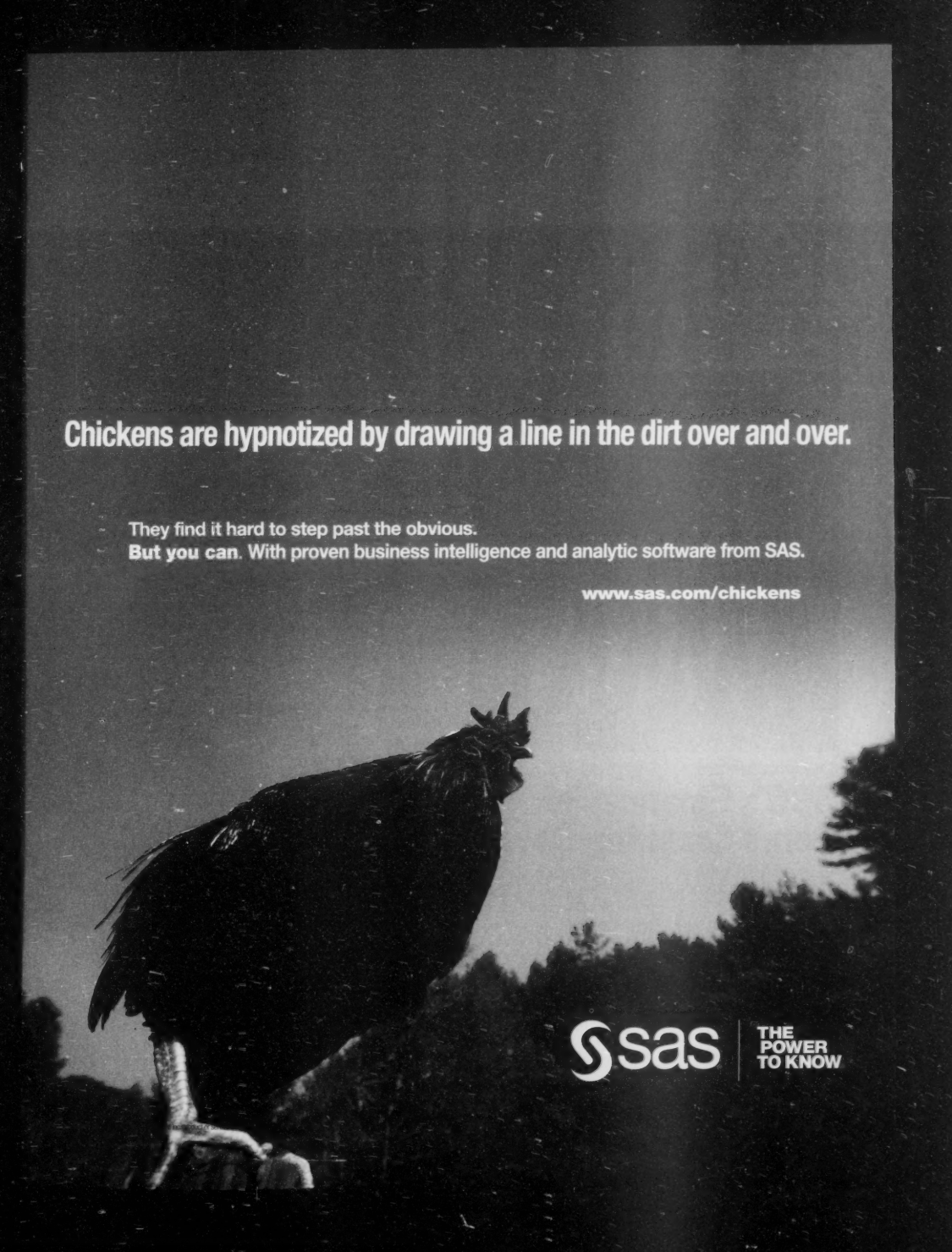
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News Digest

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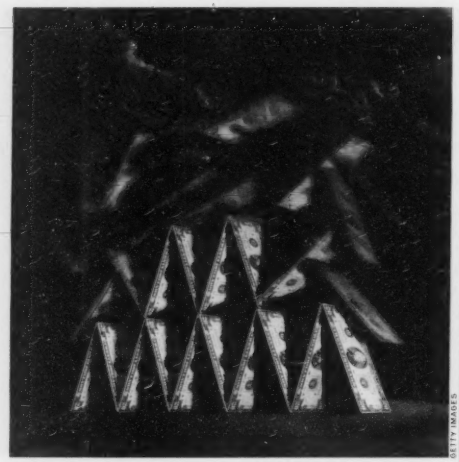
THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY: *Computerworld*'s three-day Business Intelligence Perspectives 2007 conference will begin in Las Vegas.

TUESDAY: Lawyers for Oracle and SAP are scheduled to meet with a federal judge in San Francisco about Oracle's intellectual property theft lawsuit against SAP.

THURSDAY: The Marconi Society will hold a discussion on communications issues in Menlo Park, Calif., followed on Friday by a symposium at the Computer History Museum.



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OPERATING SYSTEMS

SCO's Finances May Come Crashing Down

IN AUGUST, Darl McBride, The SCO Group Inc.'s president and CEO, declared it "one of the more exciting times" ever for the software vendor. But by last week, the excitement had taken on a whole new dimension.

SCO filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on Sept. 14, a month after a federal judge ruled that the copyrights to Unix are owned by Novell Inc. — not by SCO, as it had claimed.

The ruling dealt a serious blow to SCO's four-year-old copyright infringement case against IBM and put the company at risk of having to pay Novell more than $30 million in licensing fees paid to it by Microsoft Corp. and Sun Microsystems Inc.

The bad news continued last week. On Tuesday, SCO said in its third-quarter 10-Q statement to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission that there now "is substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern."

In addition to the fallout from the court ruling, the 10-Q noted that SCO's revenue fell 37% year to year in the third quarter and that the company's SCOsource technology licensing business had no sales at all.

And on Wednesday, SCO said it had been notified by Nasdaq that its stock will be delisted on Sept. 27 unless the company can convince an appeals panel that it has a viable business plan.

Dan Kusnetzky, an analyst at Kusnetzky Group in Osprey, Fla., said that following the judge's ruling in favor of Novell, SCO is "facing a court battle where almost every single one of their [legal] pillars has been pulled out from under them."

The lawsuits against IBM and Novell were aimed at forcing Linux vendors to sign licensing deals. But SCO's financial results have been on the decline since it began the legal fight, said IDC analyst Al Gillen.

New mobile applications software developed by SCO looks interesting, Gillen said. But the big question, he added, is whether "they can stay alive to market it."

— Todd R. Weiss, with Robert McMillan of the IDG News Service

SOFTWARE

IBM Composes A Symphony to Take On Office

ONE WEEK AFTER joining OpenOffice.org, IBM released its own version of the group's open-source desktop applications suite in another bid to diminish the market dominance of Microsoft Office.

In a nod to the past, IBM dubbed its version Lotus Symphony, reusing the name of a DOS-based office suite sold without much success by the former Lotus Development Corp. prior to its 1995 acquisition by IBM.

"My first reaction was, is this announcement from 1982?" said Rob Koplowitz, an analyst at Forrester Research Inc. But he added that with IBM, Sun Microsystems Inc. and Google Inc. all now supporting OpenOffice.org's technology, the suite finally could become a more credible threat to Office.

IBM is also promising to shake things up within the Sun-dominated open-source group. Internal changes are needed to "make the OpenOffice project more attractive to others," IBM executive Doug Heintzman said.

– ERIC LAI AND TODD R. WEISS

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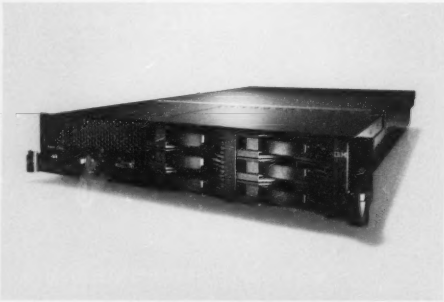

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SECURITY

Critics Say Ameritrade Failed to Heed Warnings

A DATA BREACH disclosed by TD Ameritrade Holding Corp. this month may have occurred as far back as a year ago — and possibly even earlier than that.

The Omaha-based brokerage on Sept. 14 revealed that an intrusion into one of its databases exposed the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of more than 6.2 million customers.

Lawyer Scott Kamber, who filed a spam-related class-action lawsuit against TD Ameritrade in May, contended that the company was likely aware of a possible breach as early as last October, when customers began reporting bursts of stock-related spam.

"It is really important to understand they were not [reporting the breach] because they are a model corporate citizen," Kamber said. "They were caught with their pants down."

A spokeswoman for TD Ameritrade last week insisted that the intrusion was discovered about three weeks ago during an internal investigation into spam reports. "As soon as we discovered it, stopped it and gathered enough information to notify our clients, we did so," she said.

The spam complaints prompted the lawsuit filed by New York-based Kamber & Associates LLC in federal court in San Francisco. The suit alleges that the breach's disclosure of customer e-mail addresses resulted in the spam attacks.

The class-action suit was brought on behalf of Ameritrade account holders in California as well as Internet access providers that sent the spam. A hearing on the lawsuit is set for next week.

"We agree with TD Ameritrade that hacking can happen to any company out there," Kamber said.

"But what sets apart the responsible corporate citizen from the irresponsible one is how they deal with it," he added. "TD Ameritrade waited till five months after the lawsuit was filed and one year after they learned about [the stock spam] to disclose a breach."

— *Jaikumar Vijayan*

Short Takes

Yahoo Inc. has agreed to buy Zimbra Inc., a privately held maker of a hosted collaboration and messaging suite, for $350 million. Yahoo said it hopes to tap Zimbra's clients among universities and small and midsize businesses. The deal is due to close this year.

Oracle Corp.'s sales of new software licenses grew 35% – the most in 10 years – to $1.1 billion, helping to boost the company's overall first-quarter revenue 26% to $4.5 billion. Oracle's quarterly profits rose 25% to $840 million.

Intel Corp. plans to ship the next version of its Centrino laptop package in January. The update will include a new processor and better graphics capabilities. Intel said the update, called Santa Rosa Refresh, will itself be replaced in mid-2008 with a version called Montevina.

Palm Inc., which halted development of the Foleo update to its Treo smart phone earlier this month, has warned that its revenue and profits for the quarter that ended Aug. 31 won't meet expectations.

VA Still Looking for Light at End of IT Security Tunnel

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs still has a long way to go on meeting promises to improve its IT security processes, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office that was released to the public last week.

The VA has made some progress since a laptop containing sensitive information was stolen from an employee's home in May 2006, the GAO said. But the federal watchdog added that the VA has yet to fully implement two of four security recommendations made by the GAO and 20 of 22 suggestions from the agency's own inspector general.

Testifying at a hearing held by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs last Wednesday, Robert Howard, the VA's CIO and assistant secretary for information and technology, said that he agreed with most of the GAO's findings.

Howard: Security fix "will take some time."

The VA has encrypted data on more than 18,000 laptops since a breach, Howard said. It is also rolling out software that blocks thumb drives and other unauthorized storage devices from being connected to its network. And Howard said he hopes to complete a centralization of the agency's IT operations by next July.

But when asked how close the VA is to fulfilling its vow to set a "gold standard" for IT security within the federal government, Howard wasn't specific. "I don't know, to be honest with you," he said. "All this will take some time to put in place."

– GRANT GROSS, IDG NEWS SERVICE

SOFTWARE

SAP Sets Far-reaching Goals for ERP Service

NEW YORK – **SAP AG** last week set aggressive goals for its long-anticipated hosted ERP service for small and midsize businesses — goals that some analysts called unrealistic.

At an event held here, SAP Chairman and CEO Henning Kagermann said he expects 10,000 customers to sign up for the SAP Business ByDesign service by 2010. It won't be available until 2008, he said.

How SAP will reach that goal is unclear, said Henry Morris, an analyst at Framingham, Mass.-based IDC.

"They need to have some kind of focus on what type of [small business] they are targeting," he said, noting that SAP is not aiming the service at departments within large companies. "You wonder where all these [customers] are going to come from."

"SAP put out some very aggressive statements that may be tough to reach," added Dan Sholler, an analyst at Gartner Inc.

Potential rivals include Microsoft Corp., Salesforce.com Inc. and NetSuite Inc.

The service will give users access to SAP's manufacturing, purchasing, accounting, human resources, and sales and marketing applications.

Peter Novack, CEO of Sunflower Corp., a Longmont, Colo.-based maker of lighting fixtures, said he had been searching unsuccessfully for a hosted service that offered integrated applications for small businesses.

"There isn't [another on-demand] solution that does what I'm looking for. It's intimidating for a small company.

PETER NOVACK, CEO, SUNFLOWER CORP.

Sunflower is one of 20 U.S. and German companies that are testing SAP Business ByDesign, and Novack said the service is so far meeting his needs.

"There isn't [another on-demand] solution that does what I'm looking for," he said. "It's intimidating for a small company."

— Brian Fonseca, with James Niccolai of the IDG News Service

BETWEEN THE LINES *By John Klossner*

BENCHMARKS LAST WEEK

Mozilla Corp. spun off its Thunderbird open-source e-mail client into a new for-profit subsidiary of the Mozilla Foundation and gave the unnamed company $3 million in start-up money.

Two years to the month after it last updated Office 2003, Microsoft Corp. issued the suite's Service Pack 3, which includes new security features and fixes for more than 450 bugs.

TWO YEARS AGO: Hewlett-Packard Co. announced it had agreed to buy IT asset management software vendor Peregrine Systems Inc. for $425 million in cash.

Global Dispatches

Microsoft Loses Appeal of EU Suit

LUXEMBOURG – The Court of First Instance, the European Union's second-highest court, last week dismissed Microsoft Corp.'s appeal of a European Commission antitrust ruling.

The court upheld the EC's decision to fine Microsoft €497 million ($699 million U.S.) and ordered the vendor to pay the bulk of the commission's legal expenses.

The court also found that the EC acted correctly in ordering Microsoft to unbundle Windows Media Player from the Windows operating system, and in forcing Microsoft to reveal interoperability information to makers of server operating systems.

Microsoft will "study this decision carefully" and take the steps necessary to comply with it, said Brad Smith, the company's top lawyer.

Paul Meller,
IDG News Service

iPhone Plans Set For U.K., Germany

SLOUGH, ENGLAND – Apple Inc. will introduce the iPhone in England and Germany on Nov. 9. It has partnered with cellular service providers O2 (UK) Ltd., based here, and T-Mobile Germany in Bonn to provide service for the device.

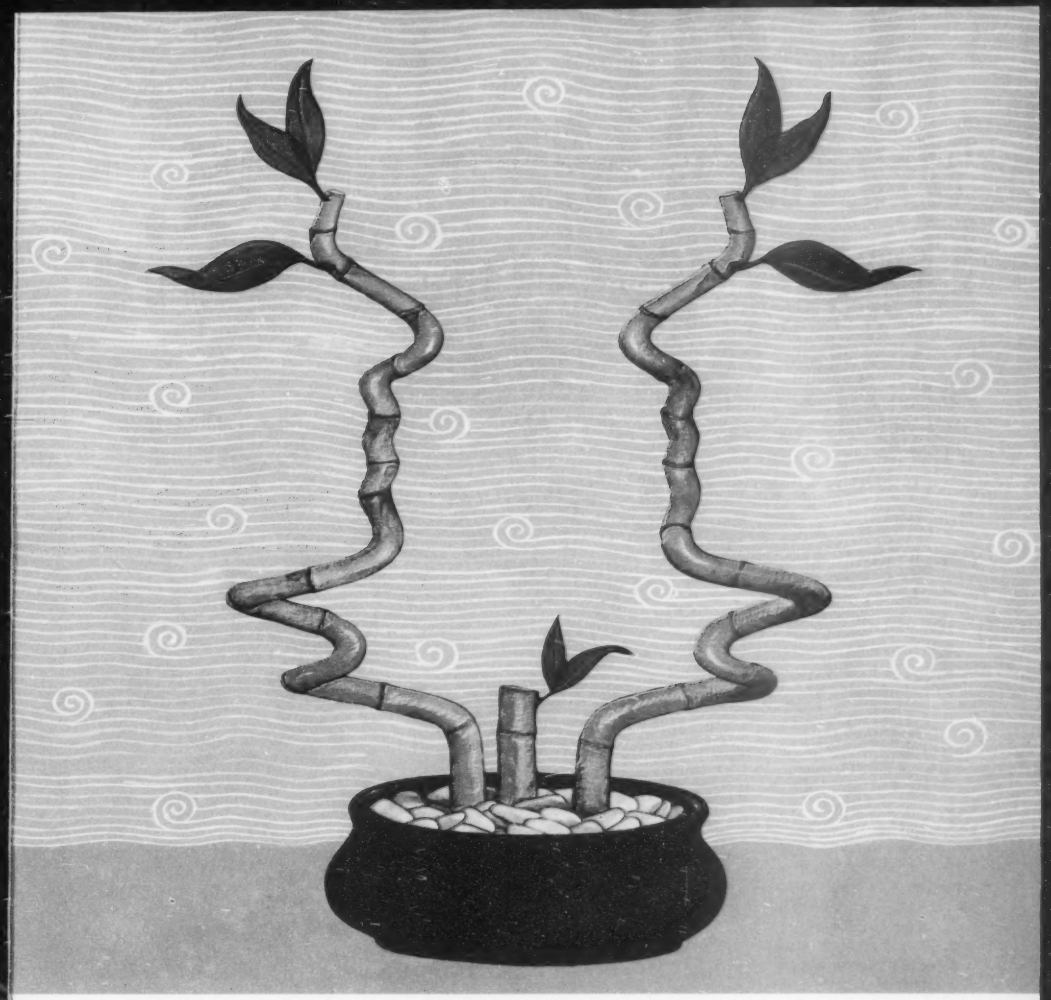
The iPhone will cost £269 ($540 U.S.) in the U.K. with an 18-month contract and €399 ($560 U.S.) in Germany with a two-year contract.

Apart from a new settings menu for international language options, the European iPhone is essentially the same as the U.S. model.

Peter Sayer,
IDG News Service

BRIEFLY NOTED

SAP AG and Misys PLC have agreed to jointly develop integrated systems for the global banking industry. The applications will incorporate SAP's NetWeaver middleware and the J2EE-based BankFusion platform from London-based Misys.



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UNITED

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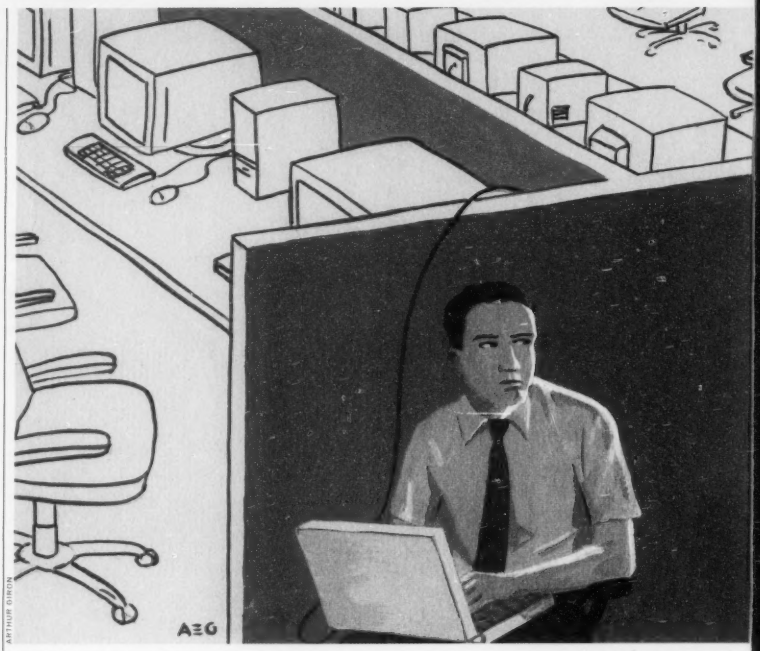
Virtual Machines Deployed on the Sly

IT execs duck user gripes and odd pricing schemes with covert jobs.

By Johanna Ambrosio



THE PROMISE of virtualization technology has convinced some companies to require that most new applications be run immediately on virtual machines.

Such a rush to virtual servers is certainly under way at The Hartford Life and Accident Insurance Co., where "the standard is that everything new comes in on virtual servers," said Bruno Janssens, senior architect in the company's infrastructure services group.

A dozen of the Simsbury, Conn.-based insurer's 5,000 servers are currently virtualized, as are some 500 Windows XP client machines, he said.

However, IT managers at some companies can feel forced to hide plans from end users and vendors in order to overcome potential objections to virtualization, said IT professionals and analysts attending *Computerworld*'s Infrastructure Management World (IMW) conference, held earlier this month in Scottsdale, Ariz.

In some cases, end users object to virtualization because they're concerned that virtual machines lack the security and performance of dedicated servers.

At the same time, many IT operations must deal with vendors that either prohibit them from implementing their software on virtual machines or establish convoluted pricing schemes for virtualized setups.

Companies are taking a variety of measures to overcome such obstacles, including adopting "don't ask, don't tell" policies in order to get virtual applications running without notifying users and vendors.

In the latest installment of a twice-yearly survey by The InfoPro, a New York-based consulting firm, about 40% of respondents from 150 large companies said they aren't asking business units for permission to implement server virtualization.

"Server pros are saying, 'I guarantee [service-level agreements], and the users don't need to know how I do it,' " said Bob Gill, director of server research at The InfoPro.

Some IT professionals at the conference defended

decisions to keep users out of the loop, while others said such dishonest dealings could prove tricky.

"It's not like we're hiding anything," said Wendy Saadi, a virtualization project manager for the city government of Mesa, Ariz.

"The application analysts know, and they'll raise objections if they see any problems beforehand," she said. "My users don't care what servers we run their applications on, for the most part, as long as it all works."

However, Saadi noted that an initial effort by a small Mesa IT team to implement virtualization without notifying users — or the rest of the IT organization — did force a change in direction.

"When we first started, [the small team] watched training videos about how to virtualize everything without asking anyone first," Saadi said. "So they did that, and we were getting a reputation [among users and other Mesa IT managers] as 'that' server group. We put the brakes on everything."

At that point, IT managers created a process for implementing virtual servers, and they prepared white papers and planning documents to keep all IT personnel involved, she said.

"We gave lots of opportunities for IT folks to help set standards and procedures" and then started the effort again, Saadi explained.

Now, she said, all of IT is notified of virtualization projects, and various IT managers represent the needs of specific users — without necessarily notifying them of the plans.

Currently, the city has 32 virtual machines running on two quad-core servers; the plan is to have 90 virtual systems by year's end.

Mike Biagioli, IT manager for Waukesha County, Wis., said that in his case, it's important that users be notified of any virtualization plans.

A "don't ask, don't tell" policy could be a "career-ending move" for a Waukesha County government employee, he said. "If you do that and people find out, they won't trust you on anything else."

■ SAIC replaced 300 physical servers with 20 servers hosting virtual machines. The effort saved $1.2 million in leasing costs over three years.

BOB LOGAN, DIRECTOR OF ENTERPRISE INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES, SAIC INC.

VENDOR DILEMMAS

Software vendors are also erecting barriers to efforts to set up virtual computing systems, according to IMW attendees.

Some vendors won't support their software at all if it's run on virtual machines, they said. Those that do support virtualized deployments have widely varied pricing schemes.

"You have to go to each vendor and ask," said Jeff Dill, senior manager of technical architecture services at aircraft parts supplier Aviall Services Inc. in Dallas.

With many vendors, Biagioli noted, "it's case by case. If you have a disaster recovery facility [that's running virtualized software] and it's not live, then that's fine — but if you turn it on, you have to pay."

Waukesha County's IT shop has had to postpone some software upgrades because of virtualization licensing concerns, according to Biagioli.

David Hodge, manager of computer systems at Systech Inc., a Woodridge, Ill.-based vendor of billing and dispatch software for concrete mixers, is one IT staffer who doesn't tell his vendors and end users about virtualization projects right away. However, his employer is a software vendor that prohibits users from virtualizing its software.

"We're one of those vendors that doesn't allow our customers to do virtualization, but I'm off in my corner doing it," he acknowledged. "It makes my job easier to just put it out there and then tell [users] later. I eventually do tell them, but just not during the initial period."

Some IT managers said that when they run into an uncooperative vendor, a common tack is to test software on a virtual machine used for development, to get a sense of how much support the application might require.

While staffers undertake that effort, the project's leader might reach out to the virtualization software supplier for help in convincing application vendors of the benefits of the technology, said IMW attendees.

Whether or not licensing issues can be resolved, it's clear that users are already buying bigger servers to help meet their virtualization needs. "The sweet spot for hardware configurations has shifted from two-socket to two-socket dual-core or two-socket quad-core" processors, said Gill.

Though the extra processing power comes in mighty handy when consolidating many servers onto one, its price tag could slow virtualization plans at some IT departments.

Bob Logan, director of enterprise infrastructure services at SAIC Inc., a research and development company in San Diego, noted that the typical server used for virtualization in his shop costs almost five times as much as an average stand-alone server.

"It's around $28,000 vs. $6,000," he said.

But the cost hasn't proven to be a problem for SAIC.

Virtualization has allowed the company to consolidate its data center by replacing 300 physical servers with 20 servers hosting virtual machines, Logan said. The effort saved $1.2 million in leasing costs over three years, he added.

According to the InfoPro survey, successful implementations like that should become far more common over the next few years.

For example, Gill said that about 28% of the respondents said they expect that half of all new servers installed at their companies this year will host virtual applications. And about 50% said that, by 2010, at least half of their new servers will likely host virtual software. ■

Microsoft Starts Clock Ticking on SQL Server 2008

The vendor plans to finalize the database upgrade in Q2 of '08 — a timeline that would cut its development cycle in half. By Eric Lai

LESS THAN two years after Microsoft Corp. very belatedly shipped SQL Server 2005, it seems oddly early to hear the software vendor talk about launching the next version of the database.

But it looks as if Microsoft will keep its promise to get back onto a two-to-three-year release cycle, after taking five years to develop SQL Server 2005.

Microsoft demonstrated many of the new features that will be in SQL Server 2008 at a conference held in Denver last week by the Professional Association for SQL Server user group.

And Ted Kummert, corporate vice president of Microsoft's data and storage platform division, said earlier this month that the upgrade will be released to manufacturing in the second quarter of 2008 — about two and a half years after SQL Server 2005 became available. "We understand that five years between major releases is too long," he said.

Kummert doesn't have much choice about delivering SQL Server 2008 when he says he will. Microsoft plans to hold a marketing blowout in February for the new database, as well as for Windows Server 2008 and Visual Studio 2008.

But Kummert claimed that Microsoft is injecting a significant amount of new functionality into the database — enough to make it a worthy upgrade, even for users who have recently migrated to SQL Server 2005.

Microsoft has already issued four Community Technical Preview (CTP) releases of SQL Server 2008, including one late last month that can be run in conjunction with its server virtualization software.

ServiceU Corp., which provides event and box-office management services, is using one of the CTP releases in some business intelligence applications. David Smith, CIO of the Cordova, Tenn.-based company, said he also plans to deploy SQL Server 2008 on mission-critical systems before its official release.

"It's exactly what I need," Smith said. For example, he pointed to new features such as tools for setting automated data management policies and logging all actions inside the database. He also said he's impressed by the upgrade's ability to compress data in three ways: by row, by page or by backing up the entire database.

Smith noted that as far as he knows, Microsoft has fallen behind on development of only a single feature for SQL Server 2008. "Otherwise, they've met their timeline," he said.

First Premier Bank in Sioux Falls, S.D., is testing a new, more transparent data encryption capability on a 2TB data warehouse based on SQL Server 2008, according to Ron Van Zanten, the credit card issuer's directing officer for business intelligence.

So far, "the performance is OK," Van Zanten said, adding that the new encryption tool is much simpler to implement than the one in SQL Server 2005. He also said that Microsoft has made its integrated data analysis reporting software much more "dynamic."

Van Zanten plans to start upgrading First Premier's 100 or so SQL Server instances, which store about 10TB of data, soon after the new version's official launch. "We won't wait until Service Pack 1," he said.

Gartner Inc. analyst Donald Feinberg said he thinks that SQL Server 2008 will put the Microsoft product on an equal technical footing with IBM's DB2 and will match Oracle databases "in terms of base functionality."

But the CTP releases aren't perfect. Van Zanten said some promised policy management features have yet to appear. And Smith wants Microsoft to make SQL Server 2008's fail-over features more sophisticated and to add the ability to automatically compress audit and event logs.

Feinberg isn't calling for wholesale upgrades by companies that use SQL Server 2005. "If you really need one of the new features, I'd recommend becoming an early adopter," he said. "Otherwise, if you're on SQL Server 2005, you can probably afford to wait." ■

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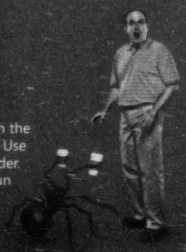
3. Use your superior intellect.
Spiders are crafty hunters and one of nature's most efficient predators. Remember though, you are a human, and while you may lack razor-sharp pincer jaws, you have opposable thumbs.

4. Turn strength into weakness.
Eight legs are great for scurrying over sticky webs. In an office setting, they can be a liability. Trip the Spider up with cables, or masking tape—whatever you have at hand. Once they're tangled, push them over and run like heck.



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On the Mark

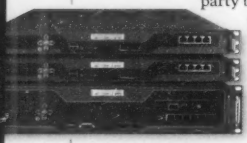
HOT TRENDS ■ NEW PRODUCT NEWS ■ INDUSTRY BUZZ BY MARK HALL

PRETTY PLEASE ALLOW ENTRY. I AM NOT BOT MALWARE. JUST A HARMLESS LITTLE FILE IN A PINK DRESS.
WHATCHA THINK SARGE - HE'S AWFULLY CUTE. DO WE LET HIM IN?
NEGATIVE.
BOT WALL
YA! LE'ME IN, TOO! I'M JUST A CUDDLY FUPPY PROGRAM!
WHERE BOTS GO TO DIE!

MATTHEW FAULKNER

Build Yourself a Botwall

CHIEF SECURITY OFFICERS have a panoply of tools to protect their companies' IT and data assets. There's the hoary firewall, the intrusion-detection system and its intrusion-protection system cousin, and antivirus and antispyware software. Now there's something new and increasingly important to add to IT's defensive perimeter: the botwall, which targets those PC zombies controlled by hackers. Shar Aziz, CEO of FireEye Inc. in Menlo Park, Calif., argues that companies need to "wall off bots" with appliances that sit inside the data center and work with systems deployed at Internet service providers and third-party technology partners. The result is a "botwall network" designed to identify and shut down bots. According to Aziz, each botwall runs a virtual victim machine (VVM), which is software that pretends to succumb to a hacker's ruse. He says the VVM captures on a "hair trigger" any suspicious traffic that gets through the firewall and analyzes it for malware. The analysis is done by all the botwalls on your network, in combination with those off-network. Aziz claims that the botwalls can quickly determine whether traffic is malevolent and then let it through or shut down any data emanating from the source domain, or take other security actions. FireEye has two botwall models, one that can handle network traffic up to 200Mbit/sec., and the other up to 1Gbit/sec. Next month, it will release a model that can process data moving at between 5Gbit/sec. and 8Gbit/sec. Pricing starts at $10,000.



FireEye's appliances target the growing problem of botnets.

Cut False Positives

Application developers are under pressure to get code into production quickly. So the last thing they want is an analysis tool that reports security problems in source code that don't even exist. Ben Chelf, chief technology officer at San Francisco-based Coverity Inc., says an add-on to Coverity Prevent SQS includes a mathematical technique known as satisfiability. The first module, the SAT False Path Pruning Solver, eliminates places in C, C++ and Java code where defects are infeasible, cutting the false positive rate to as low as 5%. Chelf hopes to improve on that number as more modules are released next year targeting problems such as buffer, string and integer overflows. Pricing for Prevent SQS is project-dependent.

Chelf: Reduce false positives in source-code security analysis.

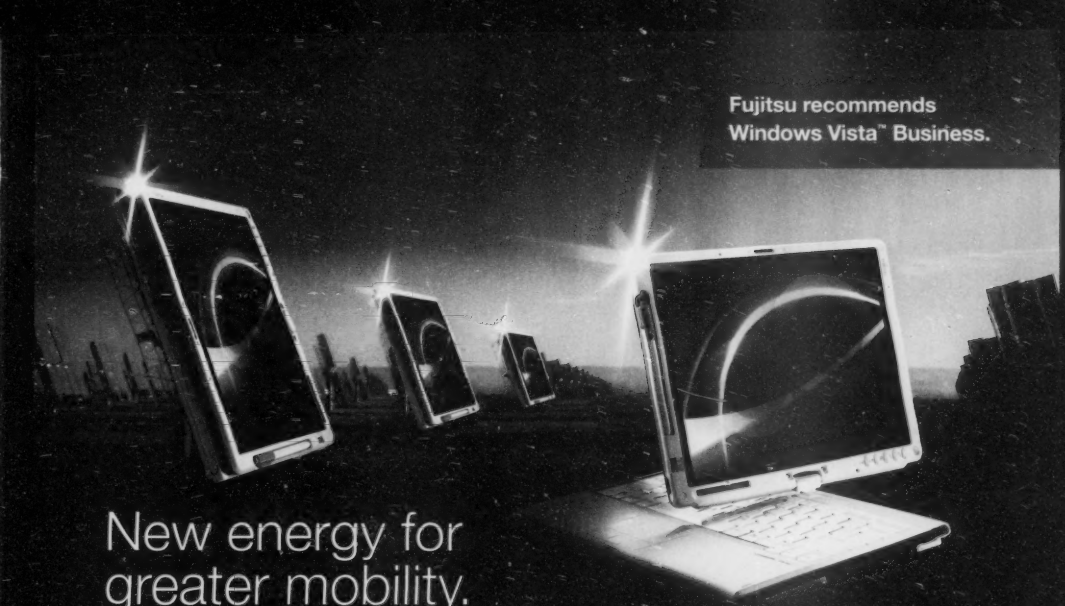
Use Keystrokes to Improve Security

Next week, BioPassword Inc. in Issaquah, Wash., will ship the 4.0 Enterprise Edition of its eponymous log-in software, whose "keystroke dynamics" feature provides biometric assurance that a user is who he says he is. Or, more precisely, who he types he is. CEO Mark Upson says the upgrade improves the accuracy of identifying users through their typing techniques to 99.2%, as verified by The Tolly Group Inc. in Boca Raton, Fla. He claims that's "equivalent to a fingerprint" as a means of identification. The release also includes support for the Citrix Access Gateway VPN. BioPassword currently integrates with Active Directory to authenticate Windows clients. In Q1, Upson says, the software will add support for Macintosh and Linux users as well as standard LDAP directories. Because the software knows how users type their usernames and passwords, it can report on who is sharing passwords with colleagues. If a user has a hand injury, is hopped up on caffeine or is experiencing something else that affects his typical typing pattern, BioPassword can offer challenge questions for log-in. A perpetual license for the Enterprise Edition starts at $50 per user. ■

10-18%

Percentage of enterprise users who share their passwords, according to BioPassword Inc.

Fujitsu recommends
Windows Vista™ Business.



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PHOTOS BY DANIEL SHEEHAN

Dossier

Name: Stuart Scott

Title: CIO

Organization: Microsoft Corp.

Outside of work . . . "My family is my biggest priority. My wife, Melanie, and I have seven children. I also enjoy playing golf and volunteering with my church and youth groups."

Read any good books lately? "I keep up on the latest business titles by reading executive summaries at *www.summary.com*."

First PC? "The original Compaq 'luggable' with a 7-in. CRT screen." (*www.vintage-computer.com/compaq_portable.shtml*)

Smart phone? HTC Dash with Windows Mobile 6

■ **THE GRILL**

Stuart Scott

Microsoft's CIO talks about playing a revolutionary role, **being his company's best customer** and **purging alien technology.**

Why would a successful CIO leave one company to become co-CIO of another with only one-third the revenue and employees? Answer: The new company is Microsoft. Stuart Scott moved there in mid-2005 from General Electric Co., the $160 billion, 319,000-employee behemoth where he had worked for 17 years, most recently as CIO of GE Industrial Systems. Then, about a year ago, co-CIO Ron Markezich was tapped to run Microsoft's budding managed services business. Scott has been Microsoft's sole CIO since then.

How is managing IT at Microsoft similar to or different from managing IT at GE?
GE grew a lot through acquiring and integrating different businesses. IT had to be at the forefront of that, to be able to connect people and to make the combinations of businesses be successful by enabling people to work together and leverage the talent that crossed from the acquired company to the host company. That's very similar to what we're doing at Microsoft.

As an example, how are you integrating the recently acquired advertising firm aQuantive? Does the company use a lot of Adobe or open-source technology?

Continued on page 22

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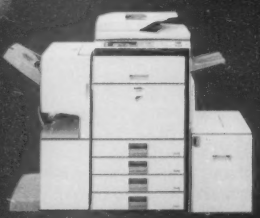

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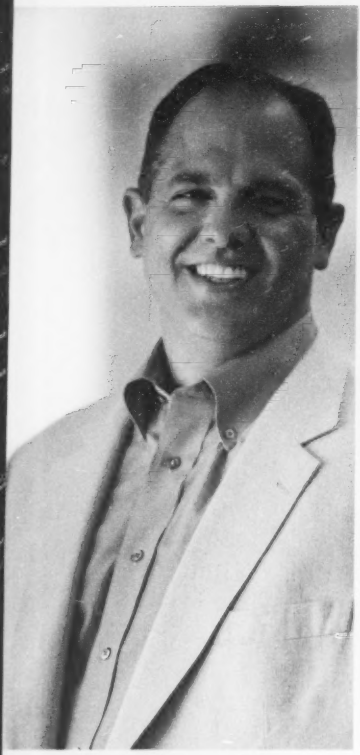
ENERGY STAR



Certainly, there are people at Microsoft that think they can do my job, but they really don't want to do my job.

Continued from page 20

Will that be dumped in favor of Microsoft technology? We're going to look at what they have and continue to leverage the technology that's in place. But yeah, we're certainly going to move them to Microsoft technology. We run our entire business today on Microsoft technology on the infrastructure side, and we're going to continue to do that.

Is there an actual prohibition on non-Microsoft technology, or do you allow exceptions at the departmental level or for esoteric back-end applications? If we have a problem that we need to get technology for, we look at the marketplace. If Microsoft has the best technology, then we certainly choose it. And if they don't, then we take that information back to our product group and we work with them to identify our needs as a customer. In some cases, we decide it's just not a large enough market for Microsoft, so I'll go out and buy third-party products.

Is there any third-party software that I would be shocked to find is widely used at Microsoft? Nothing's really surprising. We use SAP for our ERP, and that's been in place for a long time. We're actually moving some of that functionality into our [Dynamics] product. We have a large installed base of Siebel CRM that we're rapidly replacing with our own Dynamics CRM products.

Is dealing with employees who think they know better than the IT department a challenge at Microsoft? Microsoft is a challenging culture. Everyone seems to have input into everyone else's job. It keeps you sharp. Certainly, there are people at Microsoft that think they can do my job, but they really don't want to do my job. I think that just goes with the territory of any CIO.

What do you consider your main accomplishments in the two years you've been on the job? We continue to up our game in terms of being Microsoft's first and best customer. We're doing more work with the product groups, to continue to bring an enterprise customer perspective. That's a fun part of the job. I spend about a third of my time with product groups, a third with customers and a third actually running the IT organization. We have dramatically improved our execution, in terms of program delivery and financial accountability. Our spending has remained flat [while] we've more than doubled the benefits in terms of revenue and growth, as well as contributions to margin and cost-effectiveness.

You've said that you think IT should serve as a value-added partner for business. That's the approach I've always tried to take. So when I came in, we shifted 30% of our investment to higher-growth, more-strategic business areas.

Still, despite your philosophy of partnering rather than dictating, it seems like your role as CIO is more consolidated, and hence more powerful, than that of prior CIOs at Microsoft. Prior CIOs have always run the corporate systems and infrastructure for the employees. What we've added is the direct line-of-business systems. It's all part of Microsoft learning how to be a big company but still remain innovative and agile. So we have brought together the IT organizations from around the company into a more traditional enterprise structure, but I've organized it so that we stay very close to the businesses.

You hosted a summit for about 300 CIOs several months ago. What did you hear from them? That more and more, CIOs are strategic partners with their CEOs. The majority of the discussion was not about technology or the latest version of a product; it was about how you could make technology drive growth in your company, how to connect customers and salespeople together, how to speed a product to market faster than your competitor.

I believe the CIO role is going through a dramatic revolution. It is no longer about putting in monolithic ERP systems; it's about connecting people. When I look at the programs where we're getting the highest payback and benefits, it is when we bring in collaboration tools like presence awareness or unified communications or wikis and blogs, and blend them in seamlessly with the business environment.

Enabling people still means making sure that their equipment works well and is economical. It's not about command and control anymore. At the same time, you don't let go completely. Because if e-mail is not up 24/7, then I don't get invited to the product strategy meetings.

— *Interview by* **Eric Lai**

■ OPINION

Michael H. Hugos

Five Diagrams Beat A Victorian Novel

CONSIDER TWO METHODS of collecting and presenting computer system specifications to users. One is far more likely to result in disastrous development projects plagued by miscommunication and users who are unhappy with the systems that are delivered to them.

This method uses Unified Modeling Language (UML), a variation on what used to be called "Victorian novel" text specifications. UML specs mire readers in a swamp of boring words. They rely on use cases that seem very rigorous yet manage to reduce everything — from trivial details to important processing logic — into a monotonous blur of text that few people can read for more than a minute or two.

The only diversions from this text are some abstract charts, but they too are filled with words. UML documents seem to be purposely designed to confuse and disengage the typical business user. The method's widespread use is hard to explain, since it can probably be blamed for many failed system-development projects.

Instead, I use a method based on the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. I use schematics and diagrams that give both business users and developers an easy way to understand the system under development. I have seen again and again that just five diagrams can capture all necessary system design specifications. More important, these five diagrams enable effective communication between business and technical people so the system that gets delivered meets user expectations. Let me describe each diagram.

The first is a process flow diagram. Sets of leveled data-flow diagrams usually work best because they are easy for business people to understand. At times, flow charts and swim lane diagrams also have their place. People can quickly scan them and check for accuracy.

■ 'Victorian novel' text specifications for system development simply mire readers in a swamp of boring words.

Next, I capture the data identified in the process flow diagrams and plug it into a logical data model. Business users see the structure of their data and can visually scan it to check for accuracy.

I then create a screen map and screen layouts. This storyboard of screens shows users how they will interact with the system as they handle the data in the data model and perform the work specified in the process flows. This is always the most interesting diagram to users, who can clearly see how the system is being designed to work. It's where they provide most of their input.

A system architecture diagram documents the technical infrastructure that will support and drive the system. I use pictures of PCs, servers, telecom networks and Internet clouds. This diagram defines system hardware, operating systems, communications networks and data storage devices.

The last diagram is the software object model, showing both custom code and packaged software. It defines the processing logic for the custom code and the data interfaces between custom software objects and packaged software.

I add footnotes as needed to all these diagrams, explaining things that may not be clear from just looking at the pictures. Beneath the individual screen layouts, I add bullet-pointed notes to describe the processing logic that takes place for each screen.

These five diagrams represent a clear and comprehensive set of specifications. Because the diagrams are easy to understand, your business users can join your technical staff in effectively designing and developing any new system. The result is a much higher success rate on development projects than is possible using that rambling mass of words and abstractions called UML. ■

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ILLUSTRATION BY BELLE MELLOR

Tales From the Hot Seat

IT pros who have survived rough job interviews share their stories. **By Mary K. Pratt**

STORAGE. SECURITY. SERVERS. For IT pros, prepping for a job interview by mentally reviewing your areas of expertise is a no-brainer. Then the interviewer asks you to tell a joke, and it all goes up in smoke. Or maybe not.

To be sure, an interview puts you in the hot seat. But that doesn't mean you can't take control when things start going off course.

Here's a sampling of how IT professionals reacted to unexpected questions, asked bold questions of their own or managed to turn around interviews that seemed to be going badly. Most ended up with the jobs they sought, and everybody came away with a good story.

What was the best — or worst — interview question you were ever asked?

SANTOSH JAYARAM heads into interviews prepared to answer questions about technology and how it can be applied to business problems. So he was caught off-guard when an interviewer asked him instead to either tell a joke or discuss something he's passionate about.

"You're all set with your technical questions and cases, and then this question throws you off," says Jayaram, currently a business development manager at a telecommunications company in Washington.

Jayaram didn't want to tell a joke that might offend, so he talked about a passion: cooking. His response must have impressed the interviewer, who offered him a position as an associate consultant for the company's business technology office.

Randy Gould has worked in IT for nine years, mostly as a systems administrator or a senior creative technology specialist, so in interviews, he's used to answering technical questions, discussing his knowledge and talking about his career path.

He is not used to playing with fruit. But that's what he was asked to do last March when he interviewed for a job as a Macintosh specialist at the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York. Gould and two others being interviewed were given a banana, an orange and an apple and told to role-play.

"They wanted us to be original and comfortable talking in front of a group of people," Gould says, explaining that he and the others put a comic twist on their presentation, making up a skit in which they used the fruit to portray a Mac, a PC and a Linux unit.

"They want people who can think on their toes," says Gould, who landed the job and now works full time at the Apple Store.

Frank Stasa gets miffed when an interviewer's question seems more

Continued on page 28

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_INFRASTRUCTURE LOG

_DAY 79: This is out of control! Our IT environment is rigid and inflexible. Our business needs are changing, but our environment isn't built to change with them. We can't adapt. Oh, no...I was afraid of this. We're so rigid we're stuck in time.

_*Infrastructurus prehistoricus*. I've read about this.

_DAY 80: I'm taking back control with IBM SOA solutions. Now we can align business goals with our IT. We have the hardware, software and services we need to respond to change. Strategy, planning and implementation are in tune with our specific business needs. Now we can deploy and update business processes faster and more efficiently.

_Goodbye, rigid past. Hello, flexible future.

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Continued from page 25

like a bid to get technical expertise for free. He still remembers a query of that type — the worst interview question he was ever asked — from 1978.

Stasa, now CIO for the Pittsburgh Technology Council, a nonprofit business organization, was interviewing for a job doing thermal modeling and programming for a telephone company. The firm was having trouble with icicles forming on the back of its circuit boards, so the interviewer asked Stasa how he would solve the problem.

"That's the worst kind of question," Stasa says. "It's extremely unfair. They had people spending months trying to find the solution." Besides, he adds, giving an answer would be tantamount to providing free consulting.

Stasa turned the tables, asking questions about the circuit-board situation and trying to show how he would investigate the problem and find a solution. In the end, that division didn't offer him a job, though the other four company divisions that he had interviewed with did extend offers.

What's the best question you've ever asked during an interview, and how did it land you the job?

VICTOR CHEN realized that he was doing poorly in interviews because he spent too much time talking about skills that weren't pertinent to the open position. And he was hearing from recruiters and interviewers that his skills were all over the place.

So Chen decided to change his approach. He started asking interviewers, "Who in your opinion is the perfect person to fill this role?" Then he would use the interviewer's response to tailor his own description of how his skills, expertise and experience could meet the company's needs.

"I just kind of said, 'Hey, let me try this.' And it worked, so I used it again. And I realized after I started using that question that my success rate went up," says Chen.

He first used the question while interviewing for a help desk job in 2000, and it got him the job. The interviewer told him that "it was the quickest interview he had had, but it was the most eventful because I was able to focus it," says Chen, who is now a senior IT consultant at Insource Services Inc., a Wellesley, Mass.-based provider of financial, human resources and IT services.

Carolyn Leighton did her homework before interviewing for a consulting job at Hewlett-Packard Co. She researched the company, read through past press releases and learned about the executives and their backgrounds. She also studied HP's products.

Then she put the information into context during her interview with HP Laboratories, the company's central research lab. Leighton asked about a pending patent and then used the question as a bridge to talk about what she could do for HP.

"I was able to ask a question about a patent they had applied for a year earlier, which communicated the fact that I had been very thorough in learning about their company and their product before I walked in the door," Leighton says. "I believe the primary differentiator between me and the other candidates was that I focused on how I could contribute to the person interviewing me and to the company, as opposed to focusing on what I wanted and what I needed."

Leighton, who was offered the consulting position and worked with HP for four years, is now chairwoman and acting advisory board chairwoman of Women in Technology International, a trade association in Sherman Oaks, Calif.

"Relax, give the best answers ... and let the chips fall where they may.

MICHAEL JONES, CIO, CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AND HEALTH SYSTEM INC.

Nobody's Perfect

Somebody may be perfect for the job, but chances are it's not you. Don't despair. Hiring managers know that finding the perfect candidate is rare. But if you're within spitting distance, you can still ace the interview. Here are some tips from Pam Lassiter, principal at Lassiter Consulting, a career management services firm in Boston, and Pamela E. Krieger, assistant director of career development at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J.

LOWER THE STAKES. Think of the interview as an interaction on a level playing field. It will help reduce your nervousness.

EXPAND YOUR PERCEPTIONS. Think of yourself as a potential buyer of the company. That will force you to examine the entire company and ask more insightful questions.

PREPARE EXAMPLES. When the interviewer asks, "What's your greatest strength?" or "How do you handle stress?" give true stories that illustrate your selling points.

RESEARCH THE INTERVIEWER. Knowing about an interviewer's interests or accomplishments – or, better still, having a mutual friend, business associate or shared experience – will help you quickly establish a connection and relax.

PREPARE THREE BUSINESS QUESTIONS THAT GO BEYOND TECHNOLOGY. This shows you're not so buried in IT that you miss the big picture and that you realize that technology serves the business.

– MARY K. PRATT

Adam Moskowitz began his first interview at Upromise Inc. by asking the interviewer what he most wanted to know about the company, a Newton, Mass.-based credit-card loyalty program processor. "My very first question was, 'So how does the company make its money? Specifically, who pays you — the members or the vendors, and how?' " he says.

It wasn't an IT-related question, but to Moskowitz, it was important. "I've been in the computing business for more than 25 years now and have seen far too many companies with unsustainable business models — companies I have no desire to be part of for exactly that reason," he says.

The effect on the interviewer was dramatic.

"He loved it," Moskowitz recalls. "In fact, I think his answer started with something like, 'I already like the way you think.' We spent nearly the entire time talking about business-level stuff: high-availability requirements, ways to make the operation more efficient, personnel/management issues, and so on."

Not only did Moskowitz get the job — a position as senior systems administrator — he and the manager ended up working closely together on a big project. "I'd work for him again in a minute, and I'm pretty sure he'd hire me again if he ever goes somewhere else. He's also one of my references," says Moskowitz, who is now a principal consultant at Menlo Computing in Chelmsford, Mass.

How did you turn around an interview that was going south?

MIKE WOYCHECK, a technologist at the Pittsburgh Technology Council, says that IT professionals generally dread being asked questions on subjects beyond their area of expertise. "The questions can be so niche, highlighting stuff that you can't answer. The interviewer can get the impression you don't know what you're talking about," he says.

Woycheck says he keenly remembers having that experience while interviewing for a job as an IT manager at a small financial services company. The interviewer's questions revealed Woycheck's unfamiliarity with the financial services industry and statistical modeling, two areas of experience the company wanted in an ideal candidate.

Woycheck thought the interview was a lost cause, but he turned it around by talking about his previous experience, highlighting that he learned new technologies and different industries' requirements quickly. To prove the point, Woycheck says, he talked about his systematic approach to learning new material.

"I showed them I could learn the business and the sector and the statistical aspects of the job. It helped show that even though I didn't know everything about their topics, I was still a valuable candidate," he adds.

The approach worked — Woycheck landed the job.

Michael Jones is now CIO at Children's Hospital and Health System Inc. in Milwaukee. But when he was interviewing for the job of chairman of the division of medical informatics at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation, a not-for-profit multispecialty academic medical center, he found himself in an intimidating situation: He was in a room with 25 physicians and Ph.D.s who were given free rein to ask him about his qualifications for several hours.

He soon noticed that many of the doctors didn't share his sense of humor. "You had to tell them when you made a joke," he says. And others didn't like his responses to their questions. "You could tell by their body language and their looks," he recalls.

In other words, the interview wasn't going well.

Jones says that rather than panicking, he decided to "relax, give the best answers and advice I could, and let the chips fall where they may."

That perspective apparently helped him deliver strong answers and convey his expertise, because he got the job. He later learned from some of the interviewers that they had appreciated his frankness and his calm demeanor when things weren't going well.

Jesse Trucks is blunt in his assessment of an interview he had during his most recent job search. "I thought I had blown it completely," he says.

"I focused on how I could contribute to the person interviewing me and to the company.

CAROLYN LEIGHTON, CHAIRWOMAN, WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL

Trucks was talking with a hiring manager who was conducting initial telephone interviews to make sure that candidates had the technical experience required for the job.

"The beginning of the interview was focused very tightly on an area where I have some experience but am far from being an expert — high-capacity storage systems," he says. As a result, Trucks says, he was forced to punt on the first several questions, saying he would have to "investigate or look up the details."

But instead of giving up, Trucks tried to move the conversation to areas in which he had more expertise, such as security architecture. "Eventually, the interviewer asked me a question directly related to security, so I could answer with authority," he says, and after that, the interview went well. Although the company expressed interest in hiring him, Trucks ultimately took another offer instead. He is now a systems engineer at Telephone and Data Systems Inc. in Chicago. ■

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"I showed them I could learn the business.

MIKE WOYCHECK, TECHNOLOGIST, PITTSBURGH TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

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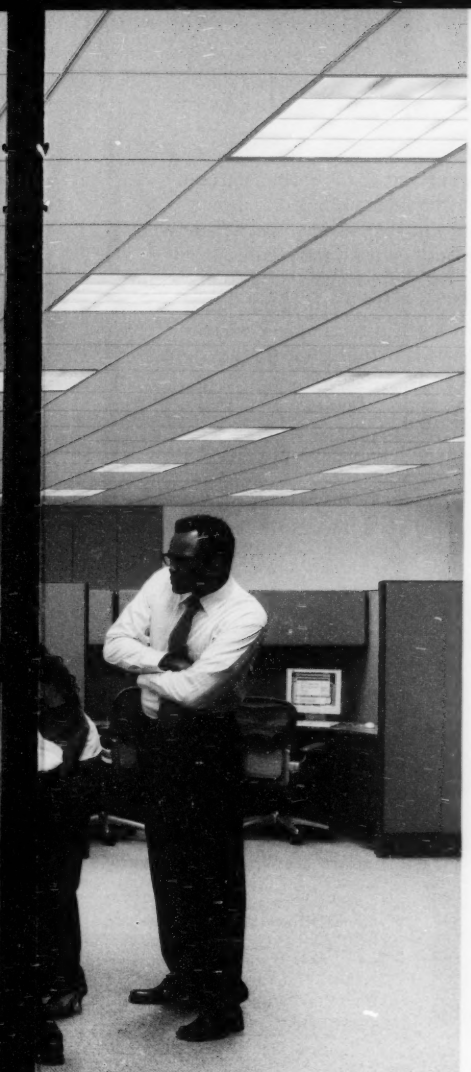

_INFRASTRUCTURE LOG

_DAY 69: All we need is one specific piece of info. Gil almost had it, but his hand cramped. How are we supposed to find trusted business info when these massive volumes of disparate, conflicting information keep pouring in?

_Gil just grabbed a stuffed panda.

_DAY 71: The answer: IBM solutions for leveraging information. Now we can cleanse info and standardize source data fields for consistency and accuracy. I can create a single, comprehensive and accurate record of info across our source systems. Finally, I can provide a unified, trusted view of our information so everyone can make better decisions.

_Our view of our data is now scalable. Just in time—I think we ran out of quarters.

Information Management

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Blogger Beware!

The legal risks of corporate blogging.

By Lawrence Savell

A CORPORATE BLOG can certainly help your company "get the word out" in an effective and efficient manner. But that valuable online presence may carry with it substantial legal risks.

Let's first define what we mean by a corporate blog. It's a blog that's written, published and maintained by or at the direction of a company — by company employees working within the scope of their employment or by an outside contractor/vendor, or some combination thereof.

Increasing your sensitivity to potential claims can help reduce your company's liability exposure. Here are some guidelines.

1 Consider whether your content may defame a person, business or product. Generally, a defamatory statement is a false and disparaging assertion about another that causes injury to reputation. A few things to keep in mind:

■ Statements may be protected if they are truly opinions and are not capable of being proved either true or false.

■ The fair-reports privilege protects fair and accurate reports of governmental proceedings and records.

■ Truth is a complete defense to a defamation claim, but it's still a good idea to reduce risks by incorporating less-than-absolute words like "may" or "might" or terms like "alleged" or "reported."

If you determine that a defamatory statement was posted on your blog, a prompt removal and correction or clarification should help reduce potential damages.

2 Don't use another party's copyrighted material without permission. Be sure you incorporate only material that you own or that you have permission or the right to use. There is one exception: "Fair use" allows other parties besides the copyright owner to use copyrighted material in a reasonable manner without the owner's consent in certain circumstances. Common examples include parody, criticism, commentary and news reporting. But you should credit the author.

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3 **Be careful when using the trademarks of others.** Make sure that you have permission to use any other individual's or company's brand names or trademarks that you display. Trademark issues can also include the registration of domain names that allegedly infringe on existing trademarks and the use of trademarks of others in metatags. An example of the latter: Company A inserts the trademarked name of Company B in Company A's metatags. This is a no-no because it might confuse people who are looking for Company B's blog but are directed by a search engine to Company A's blog.

4 **Watch out for potential invasions of privacy.** Statements that invade the privacy of others can provide the basis for a legal claim. With increasing federal and state legislation regarding Internet privacy, many bloggers post (and many readers expect to see) privacy statements promising to protect the confidentiality of personal information that may be provided or collected, such as that transmitted in the course of blog registration/log-in by those seeking to post comments. Blog hosts must comply with their own established policies.

5 **Keep applicable advertising laws and regulations in mind.** Certain blogs may be viewed in whole or part as advertisements. An example: the blog of a business that pointedly extols the quality of its staff and services to potential customers and clients. If so, bloggers must comply with applicable advertising, consumer protection, deceptive practice and unfair-competition laws and regulations.

6 **Recognize the risks of employee blogging.** Companies are generally held responsible for actions their employees perform within the scope of their employment. Employers should remind employee bloggers that corporate policies may apply to their blog postings. These may include policies regarding proprietary or confidential information of the business and its clients, as well as applicable governmental requirements such as securities laws regarding disclosures.

And for Good Measure

There are a number of additional steps you or your company can take to minimize legal exposure relating to a corporate blog.

Check your insurance policies.

Determine whether these types of risks are covered. If they're not, consider obtaining additional coverage such as third-party media liability coverage for infringement and liability costs associated with Internet publishing.

Use disclaimers.

As noted, you may be able to disclaim or deny liability to a degree through properly worded statements posted on your blog.

Consider a posted "terms of use" notice.

Set forth the parameters of use and require acceptance of the terms.

– LAWRENCE SAVELL

7 **Take care when drafting contracts with outside providers of corporate blog content.** If you use an outside person or entity to create content for your blog, be sure your agreement with that provider gives you the rights you need. It should be structured as a grant of "all rights" to your company, or as a "work made for hire," with an express agreement that the copyright belongs to the party commissioning the work. (For content created by an employee within the scope of his job, the employer automatically owns all rights, and thus no grant is necessary.)

8 **Beware of allowing posts or comments by third parties.** These can present significant risks that can be avoided by simply not allowing them. Your business model may encourage third-party contributions to your corporate blog, however. In that case, notify posters that they are representing that they have the right to post the content in exchange for your giving them the opportunity to post. This may reduce your liability somewhat, but if a poster plagiarizes material, you may still be found responsible if the true owner sues. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act may provide some insulation if applicable and if you remove infringing content once alerted. The Communications Decency Act of 1996 may provide some protection regarding defamatory statements posted by a third party.

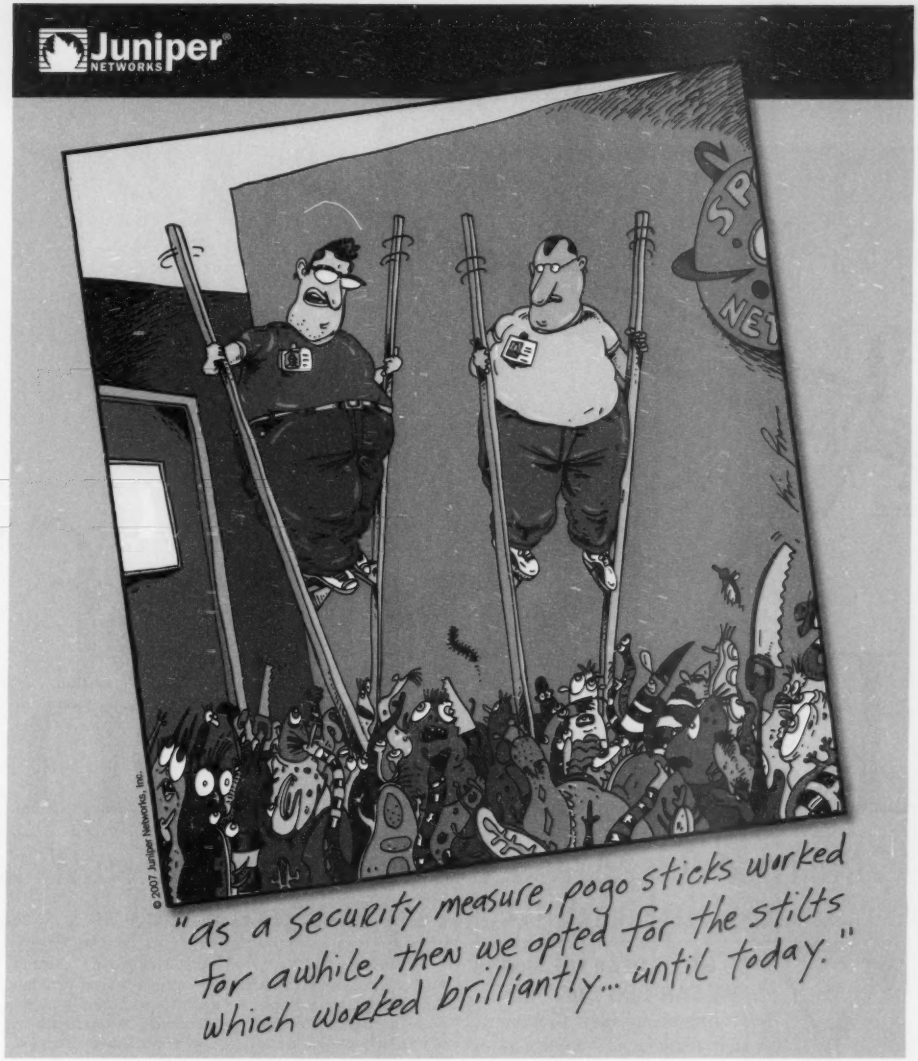
9 **Be careful about providing external links.** Accompany them with a notice disclaiming responsibility for and denying any endorsement of products, services or information contained on outside sites.

10 **Retain legal counsel.** As you can see, your potential liability largely depends on the details of your circumstances. To get the full picture, consider preventive legal review or monitoring by in-house or external counsel with expertise in these areas. Ask your lawyer to educate and update involved personnel on pertinent legal issues, and consult counsel on questions about contemplated blog content.

Sensitizing yourself and your company to the major legal issues and taking steps to deal with them in advance can help reduce the risks of legal liability for corporate blogs. An ounce of prevention can save you a lot of headaches and expense down the road. ■

Savell *is a litigator at the New York office of Chadbourne & Parke LLP who deals regularly with technology and the law. Contact him at lsavell@chadbourne.com.*

Juniper NETWORKS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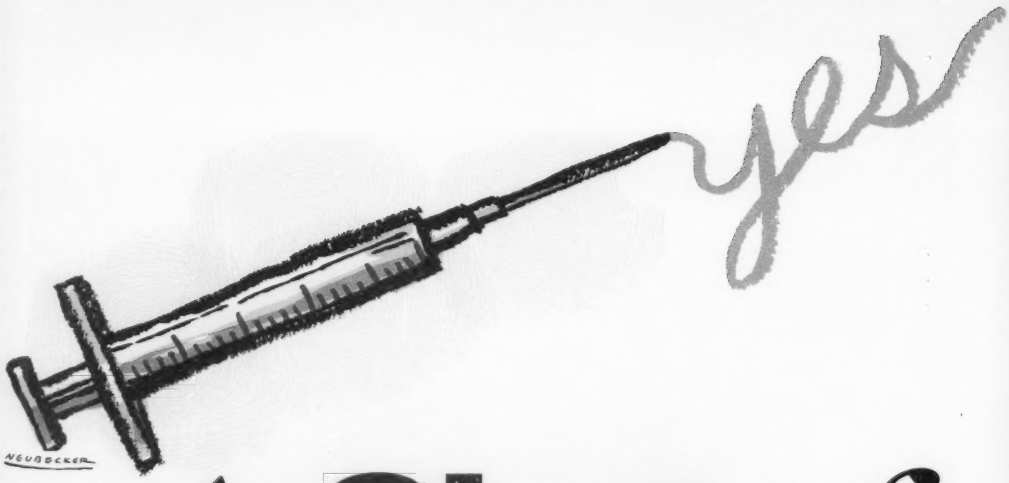

A Shot of Innovation

Partners HealthCare is teaching its IT staff to think creatively. By Mary Brandel

YOU WON'T HEAR THE WORDS "WE CAN'T DO THAT" from Donna Fernandez. Since participating in a 16-week employee innovation program at Partners HealthCare System Inc., she has been trying to eliminate that type of negative response from her vocabulary. "I no longer take 'no' for an answer without questioning why instead it couldn't be 'yes,' " she says.

Fernandez is a senior project specialist at Partners Continuing Care, the non-acute care services division of Boston-based Partners. The program she participated in was launched in January 2006. Its goal is to spark innovative thinking in the 1,200-member Partners IT organization. IT leaders feared that fast growth over the previous 10 years had sapped the group of some of its entrepreneurial, can-do spirit — an attitude it needed in order to face health care's increasingly complex challenges.

"The vision is to improve the staff's ability to think broadly and innovatively when dealing with challenges in their day-to-day jobs," says Joanne Tremblay, who manages the innova-

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

tion program in addition to her role as associate director of application development at Partners. "The objective was to expose them to innovation in a hands-on way."

Selected participants are divided into groups, each of which tackles a complex business challenge and, at the program's end, presents an approach to meeting the challenge. On top of their regular jobs, the employees are expected to conduct research independently and, with their teams, attend discussions led by guest speakers and embark on "experience trips" to stimulate innovative thinking.

Dick Oleen, CEO of Oleen Health Care Information Management Inc. in Silver Spring, Md., says he thinks the program is an excellent idea for many reasons. He adds, however, that it may not be practical for every IT department.

"The focus of the IT department is [often] on a particular initiative, and not all of them have the resources to support multiple learning experiences," Oleen says.

LIVING THE LESSONS

Unlike IT staffers who often view this type of program as "flavor of the month" management or, worse, a big waste of time, Partners' program graduates and their supervisors have a different perspective. They attest that participants now venture outside their former comfort zones, creatively resolve project challenges, understand their day-to-day jobs in the bigger context of Partners' mission and culture, and confidently reach out to peers and even senior managers in other divisions for advice and input.

For several participants who were already on the path for a promotion, the program bolstered their ability to move forward, according to direct supervisors. One participant who was promoted became so interested in better collaboration among the clinical quality group, IT clinical research and the division of general medicine at Brigham & Women's Hospital that she led the development of a joint Web site to support the exchange of knowledge and resources among the groups.

According to Cara Babachicos, Fernandez's supervisor and CIO at Partners Continuing Care, Fernandez is "able to see things in a more big-picture fashion and apply more creativity to the job."

For instance, Fernandez doesn't ask her supervisor for help with project roadblocks as frequently as she used to, Babachicos says.

On a recent project, Fernandez "continually approached challenges from different angles," Babachicos adds, working with four to five groups to negotiate issues such as what Web server transactions and user interfaces should look like and how Web server needs would change. "It involved a lot of different people and follow-ups and meetings at many different levels," she says.

Fernandez agrees that she handles projects differently than she once did. "We learned to look outside our own tunnel vision to get a bigger perspective, and I definitely think about that when I'm presented with certain situations," she says.

For instance, when she was working to enhance an application for transferring patients from acute care to the continuing care area she works in, Fernandez often found herself relaying ideas from the business users to the developers, only to hear that those ideas couldn't be carried out. "But instead of taking a 'no' back to the customer, I said, 'What can we do instead?' " she explains. "And it worked."

Fernandez says she learned this technique when visiting Monster.com's Inno-

Brain Teasers

Here are some of the business challenges the participants in Partners HealthCare System's innovation program were asked to address:

Session I

- Using telecommunications to improve patient services.
- Developing a business plan for a regional clinical data exchange.
- Examining IT opportunities to improve the health of patients with chronic diseases.
- Exploring the ramifications of the increasing commoditization of infrastructure technologies.

Session II

- Becoming a more agile organization.
- Transforming IT into a revenue center.
- Creating smart buildings.
- Leveraging emerging technologies in the workplace.

"The objective was to expose [IT staff] to innovation in a hands-on way."

JOANNE TREMBLAY, INNOVATION PROGRAM MANAGER AND ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT, PARTNERS HEALTHCARE SYSTEM INC.

"I no longer take 'no' for an answer without questioning why instead it couldn't be 'yes.'"

DONNA FERNANDEZ, SENIOR PROJECT SPECIALIST, PARTNERS CONTINUING CARE

"You feel liberated to try things you've never tried before and see how it works.

MARIANNA EPSTEIN, TEAM LEADER IN THE WEB APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT GROUP, PARTNERS HEALTHCARE SYSTEM INC.

vation Lab, where employees encourage brainstorming by responding positively, even to ideas they don't agree with. "They wouldn't immediately shoot ideas down," she explains. "Instead of saying, 'No, I don't agree,' they'd say, 'Yes,' and then explain their own point of view."

Marianna Epstein, team leader in Partners' Web application development group, agrees that the program has elevated her thinking. "I try to never think, 'It's impossible,' but rather, 'What can I do to make it happen despite all the difficulties?' " she says.

Epstein applies this regularly to her job, which involves advocating for the use of a secure Web portal for patients and doctors. Because it involves changing people's ingrained behavior, it can be a daunting task, she says. But now, "my head is swirling with ideas of what more we can do," such as road shows and e-mail marketing, she says.

Epstein says that before attending the program, she may have discounted the idea of e-mail marketing because of privacy concerns, but now she avoids that kind of self-screening.

"Now, I'd consider going to the security department and asking them what the regulations are or under what conditions can these e-mails be acquired," she says. "You feel liberated to try things you've never tried before and see how it works. I don't feel like I have to wait for big ideas to come from the top."

Of course, the program isn't perfect. The biggest

How It Works

Here are some of the basic elements of the innovation program at Partners HealthCare System:

- **DURATION:** 16 weeks
- **PARTICIPANTS:** 16, divided into four groups
- **MENTORS:** Each group is assigned a mentor (a CIO or a director at Partners) and a peer mentor who has completed the program.
- **TASKS:** Each group tackles a complex business problem with which the participants have little or no previous experience.
- **ACTIVITIES:** Groups take off-site "experience" trips and hear guest speakers. Trips have included visits to the Center for Medical Simulation and Massachusetts General Hospital's Operating Room of the Future, as well as tours of other business-partner facilities. Guest speakers have included Partners executives, such as its CEO, chief financial officer and the chief nursing officers; Partners board members; CIOs from related industries and business partners; external IT management experts; and area business and thought leaders.
- **GOAL:** Expose small numbers of employees to new experiences and thought patterns, so that when they return to their regular duties, their fresh approaches will catch on among peers and direct reports.

– MARY BRANDEL

Fastest Growing Middleware

Source: Gartner "Market Share: Application Integration, Middleware and Portal Software," Worldwide, 2005. Based on 2005 license revenue worldwide.

complaint from supervisors and participants is the time commitment involved. "The program can be all-encompassing, and we had a huge project going on at the time," says Susan Kananovich, corporate manager of revenue and decision-support systems, who supervised a program participant.

It didn't help, she says, that during the first session, participants were also asked to experiment with working in a virtual office. "We didn't see them for two or three weeks," Kananovich says. "I didn't think it was a good idea" to combine the two initiatives.

Partners made some changes to the second session to reduce the time commitment, Tremblay says. For instance, the virtual office endeavor was separated from the innovation program, and the scheduled speakers were spread out more consistently over the duration of the program. Participants were also given a month's lead time to plow through reading materials before the program started.

Tremblay also made some administrative changes, such as creating an online calendar for teams and supervisors to share and emphasizing that the program should take no more than 25% of a participant's time. "The commitment was greater than 35% at times," she says. "At the end, when they were preparing their presentations, it was up to 75% for some people, so we've tried to even that out."

The program was tweaked in other ways as well. For instance, four graduates from the first session served as peer mentors for the second-session teams, in response to feedback that participants weren't always clear on what was expected of them.

Another missing component was team-building, Tremblay says, so second-session groups got some bonding time at the Center for Medical Simulation, which offers workshops in a highly realistic clinical environment, through a partnership with the Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology. "The more you can do to get started off right, the better," she says.

REAL RESULTS

So far, two sessions of the program have graduated 32 participants. Although teams weren't expected to actually resolve the business challenges assigned to them, one group — which worked on a business plan for MA-SHARE, a regional clinical data exchange — actually generated usable results, according to Tremblay.

"We helped them define their 'elevator speech' of what the system would do at a particular price point, and they've been working with that model," says Patrick Brown, team lead for Partners' e-commerce gateway and a program participant.

One of the lessons Brown learned through the program was that innovatively solving a problem is not just about creativity; it's also about framing the business problem correctly and focusing only on the obstacles directly related to the problem you're trying to solve.

Brown is interested in promoting innovation further throughout Partners.

"It would be great to find a way to leverage those of us who went through the program to tackle smaller problems in a shorter time frame and just keep the innovation juices flowing," he says. "We have the ability to raise the impact of this program, if the benefits can be applied to the organization as a whole." ■

Brandel *is a* Computerworld *contributing writer in Newton, Mass. Contact her at marybrandel@verizon.net.*

"It would be great to find a way to leverage those of us who went through the program.

PATRICK BROWN, TEAM LEAD FOR E-COMMERCE GATEWAY, PARTNERS HEALTHCARE SYSTEM INC.

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Customer Service Meets Infosec

Being the **security Nazi** is easy. What's hard is treating users like **customers** and recognizing their **legitimate needs.**

Trouble Ticket

AT ISSUE: Users want to sync data to handhelds, removing it from the protected network.

ACTION PLAN: Find a way to say yes, despite security concerns.

ONCE AGAIN, users' demands for mobility have come crashing up against my commitment to the best security possible. Some users want to synchronize their data with their Palm Treos. Looked at from the viewpoint of productivity, it's a no-brainer to say yes. But as the person responsible for keeping data from straying too far from home, my knee-jerk reaction is to say no, no, no. Our policy is to keep confidential and protected information on the protected network.

The justification for this policy should be clear to anyone who follows the news about data breaches. Laptops and other mobile devices have accounted for countless breaches at this point. I want to keep my state agency off the front page. And unlike a retailer, we're dealing with data that is governed by HIPAA. It's my job to protect all of that information and avoid having to report to the feds and face a possible fine.

So far, no breaches. But I am becoming known as the "mobility Nazi." I don't mind the label as much as my inner conflict when security concerns keep me from approving things that will boost productivity. My users might not believe this, but I'd like to make their lives easier. They have it hard enough operating within the confines of a bureaucratic organization.

In fact, I believe that all departments must have a customer service orientation, regardless of whether their customers are external or internal. As the head of security, I have to balance our need to protect data with our users' need to work efficiently. After all, if a business can't do its job, security could be beside the point. The business could go under. True, a state agency isn't going to go bankrupt, but there are still good reasons to be more productive. I'm a state employee, but I'm also a taxpayer, and I like knowing that the government is trying to be more efficient. As a taxpayer, I want the cost savings that entails and a smooth, hassle-free experience when I have to get something done.

■ I believe that all departments must have a customer service orientation.

SMART SECURITY

The trick is to do smart security. If data needs to go mobile, so be it. I will do everything in my power to provide the absolute best security that technology can provide. And that costs taxpayers money. As you would in any business, you have to calculate the return on investment and proceed accordingly.

And so, those Treos. At purchase, we ensured that data transmissions would be encrypted and that e-mails would not be stored on the vendor's network but instead forwarded directly to the phones. Now we need to address encrypting the data on the phones themselves.

If we're going to change our policy and allow data to leave the protected network, all the chiefs must agree. I told my own boss that while data syncing is an important function of Treos, it would require that the data be encrypted. In addition, the devices would have to be password-protected and treated like miniature PCs, with all the extra security-awareness training that would involve.

The chiefs, of course, were willing to agree to my restrictions if it meant they could store important presentations and documents on their mobile phones. So I contacted our service providers to see what types of encryption software are available for the devices. I now have a list of products to review and will have to do that quickly.

I hate rushing into things, but the minute you tell people they can do something, they want to do it *now*. Security should not be rushed, of course, but my desire to provide good customer service helps me reach a good compromise now and again. It can shove me out of my stubborn security stance, but I always look carefully to see where the fine line is between the two. ■

COMPUTERWORLD.COM

JOIN IN

To join in the discussions about security, go to **computerworld.com/blogs/security**

This week's journal is written by a real security manager, **"C.J. Kelly,"** *whose name and employer have been disguised for obvious reasons. Contact her at mscjkelly@yahoo.com.*

ONE BATTLEFIELD
ONE AGENT

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TRBA

■ OPINION

Robert L. Mitchell

Analytics and the Mortgage Meltdown

NO ONE would argue that the mortgage industry lacks state-of-the-art analytics tools. In fact, analytics played a central role in keeping the recent housing boom alive.

Improved algorithms and increased computing power have allowed lenders to analyze data faster than ever. So why didn't those programs help lenders predict the current subprime loan crisis?

On the front end, analytics facilitated the boom in nontraditional mortgages by helping lenders create new loans faster — including loans to the subprime market. Unfortunately, the risk models used didn't include factors such as the impact of flat or negative home price growth.

And since professional real estate appraisals can delay deals, many lenders used automated valuation models. These "appraisal emulation" programs establish a value based on many variables, including the asking prices for similar properties. Ever-higher asking prices would serve to validate ever-higher appraisals. "You can get approvals within 15 minutes," says Christopher Cagan, director of research and analytics at First American CoreLogic. But without a live inspection, lenders didn't know the true value of an individual property.

Then, as housing prices soared, lenders created new products to keep the boom going. They offered riskier loans with enticements such as no money down, no income verification, interest-only payments and even negative amortization. Lenders ignored the risks because in a rising market, they couldn't lose. "Home prices were growing so fast that even if the borrower got into trouble, it would rarely lead to a loss," says Mike Beardsell, director of risk model analytics at LoanPerformance. In some cases, lenders relied only on the applicant's credit score to approve the loan. Brokers then sold bundles of such mortgages into the secondary market.

■ The market was changing faster than the statistical models could keep up.

The agencies that rated mortgage-backed securities used statistical models based on how traditional mortgage loans performed, so those had to be adjusted, Beardsell says, but "the market was changing faster than the models could keep up."

And since values were increasing at double-digit rates, users of the models assumed that borrowers would have enough equity to refinance when low teaser rates on adjustable-rate mortgages expired.

Those mortgages were mixed with others into pools that were "securitized," rated and distributed to investors, who often borrowed money to purchase them. The value was determined by statistical models that assumed a continuing rise in home values. But even if the risk of declining property values had been factored in, the market was so hot that it wouldn't have mattered. "People said, 'We've got to do it, because if we don't, someone else will,' " says Dennis Santiago, CEO of Institutional Risk Analytics. And once the loans were sold and off the initiators' books, they weren't their problem anymore.

Then the boom ended, values declined, teaser rates reset, and delinquencies skyrocketed. "It was the perfect storm," says Beardsell.

Recently, Cagan ran the automated valuation model against a database of properties backing $326 billion in loans made from 2004 to 2006 to predict foreclosures on adjustable-rate mortgages as rates reset. He estimates that in the next six to seven years, investors will lose $112 billion of value as 7% of adjustable-rate mortgages, 32% of teaser loans and 12% of subprime loans default.

The moral: "Analytics are a tool for the human mind," says Cagan. "They can't replace judgment." ■

Robert L. Mitchell *is a* Computerworld *national correspondent. Contact him at robert_mitchell@computerworld.com.*

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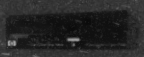

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Career Watch

■ Q&A

S. 'Paddy' Padmanabhan

The executive director and head of global human resources at **Tata Consultancy Services Ltd.** talks about finding workers in a shrinking talent pool.

How does TCS compete for IT talent? TCS plans to add 32,000 employees in fiscal 2008. To do that, we have a talent sourcing ecosystem that branches across India, North America, the U.K., China, Singapore, Eastern Europe and Latin America. One way we gain access to new graduates is our Academic Interface Program [AIP], through which we engage in research collaboration, faculty development programs, student internships, workshops, awards and TCS-sponsored events and courses.

Does TCS exclusively target young, inexperienced – and therefore inexpensive – workers? No. On average, every year, we hire about 50% fresh graduates and 50% experienced professionals.

What can a worker do to maintain a career in today's environment? Work will be done where it is done best by the right people, whether that's in India, Eastern Europe, Latin America or China. The IT industry demands a great deal of mobility, and future IT professionals should be accustomed to and gain experience in working across multiple geographies.

Along with a mobile mind-set, the ability to adapt and innovate, a willingness to learn, and the ability to collaborate are important attributes.

What areas are most fruitful for TCS recruiters? TCS is hiring extensively in Brazil, Uruguay, China, the U.S. and Singapore. In our global delivery centers, from China to Chile, less than 5% of our people are from India.

Does TCS do anything to encourage young people to take up the study of computer science? With the Faculty Development Program, part of AIP, we collaborate with universities on custom-made course curricula for students in engineering colleges in smaller towns in India. We also contribute PCs to needy schools so students have exposure to computers at an early age. And TCS employees teach in schools and colleges to share their knowledge in IT.

– JAMIE ECKLE

PAGE COMPILED BY JAMIE ECKLE.

Newly En-titled

Futurists at Washington-based Social Technologies LLC say the following new types of jobs are on the horizon for 2020:

- **E-scrubber:** Works to undo or minimize the indiscretions that people accumulate on the Web.
- **Unrealtor:** Creates virtual tourism, adventure and retail destinations.
- **Deceptionist:** Provides tech-enabled deception services for those wishing to disguise their activities.
- **Geoscaper:** Makes corporate and private properties look attractive in Google Earth-style aerial views.
- **Unplugger:** Counselor who helps wean people from excessive technology use.

And some of the newest titles currently to be found in IT, as reported by Carolyn Duffy Marsan in *Network World*:

- **Information steward:** Responsible for how information is handled and stored across a company.
- **Service delivery manager:** Takes all the components of a company's technology – networking, servers, software and storage – and delivers them to a business unit or a group of users as a service.
- **Technology-business relationship manager:** Helps the CIO understand the business perspective and serve business customers better; also gets business executives jazzed up about the capabilities that new technology can bring.
- **Outsourcing relationship manager:** Holds outsourcing vendors to their agreements and fixes problems when they arise.
- **Mobile-application developer:** Pulls together all the latest technologies – handheld devices, wireless networks, security, unified communications and collaboration tools – to support on-the-go executives, telecommuters and other virtual workers.

Life's Toughest Challenges

Asked to rank life challenges such as dealing with bereavement, divorce, health issues, getting married, moving and raising children, making a transition at work was most often ranked most challenging – by 19% of respondents to a survey of U.S. and global business leaders by Development Dimensions International Inc.

Asked to choose the most difficult adjustments required when taking on a new position at work, respondents chose challenges well known to IT professionals, including navigating organizational politics, dealing with ambiguity and getting work done through others.

MOST DIFFICULT TRANSITIONAL ADJUSTMENTS

Navigating organizational politics	64.9%
Dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty	55.5%
Getting work done through others	55.3%
Engaging and inspiring employees	46.0%
Creating a new network	42.6%
Managing high-risk decisions	40.2%
Representing the corporate line	37.7%
Learning to lead across borders	36.9%
Thinking strategically	36.1%
Giving up my reputation as an expert	32.8%

SOURCE: DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS INTERNATIONAL INC.'S FALL 2006 SURVEY OF 365 U.S. AND 400 GLOBAL LEADERS IN FRONT-LINE, OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC ROLES

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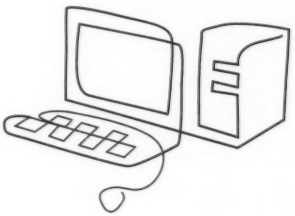

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How Things Work

It's late on an already stressful Monday when this pilot fish gets a high-priority trouble ticket: a laser printer with a red light that won't go off. "It had a steady paper-jam light," says fish. "I pulled the paper tray and checked for torn paper bits. Nothing. I opened the printer to remove the toner cartridge, and it took a moment for my mind to register the lack of a toner cartridge amid the paper dust. The AWOL cartridge was on a desk behind me. As soon as I reinstalled it, the printer started cranking out pages. I knew as I got in my car what the user's answer would be the next morning, and I wasn't disappointed: 'Sorry about that. I removed it so I could get some paper out of it that had been stuck.' One of these days, I'll get the hang of how things work around here."

How to Save

At the tail end of a server-room move, the company owner spots a way to save $10,000: use a box fan instead of a special cooling unit. "Against my advice, we tried his suggestion for a few weeks," says a pilot fish on the job. "Did I mention the office building we are in turns off the central air conditioning on the weekends? Three Sundays in a row, we got frantic calls from him about not being able to access his Web mail. Turns out the thermal protection switches on the equipment kicked in and shut the equipment off. Within a month, the server room had a cooling unit installed."

D'ya Think?

This pilot fish figures she's explained at least 700 times to the engineers at her company that a VPN connection uses whatever route is available over the Internet. But do they get it? "Today, equipment changes being made at our headquarters overseas took our Internet connection down," reports fish. "All users were notified of the temporary Internet interruption. Then I received a phone call from one of the engineers: 'Would this Internet problem cause the VPN to not connect?' "

Who Needs It?

A batch of this company's PCs are being decommissioned for sale to employees, and this pilot fish draws the task of wiping the hard drives and reinstalling original system software. His boss asks how long it will take, and the fish explains it'll be four hours per machine, because he's doing a seven-pass erase of each hard drive. "He asked whether such a slow process was really necessary," fish says. "I just looked at him and said, 'Only if you mind all your e-mail and other files being read by your subordinates.' The conversation ended after that, and I was allowed to resume working."

■ *Keep the conversation with Sharky going. Send me your true tale of IT life at sharky@computerworld.com. You'll get a sharp Shark shirt if I use it.*

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■ FRANKLY SPEAKING

Frank Hayes

IT's Lock-in Rut

LAST WEEK'S biggest news was old news: Microsoft will have to pay a big fine and make changes to Windows because the company illegally tried to lock in European customers. Yes, you remember right: That news *did* originally come down in 2004. Hey, sometimes it takes a while before we notice.

But lock-in is nothing new — from vendors *or* IT people.

Vendors have always tried to lock us in by using bundling, proprietary technology and secret programming interfaces. That has gotten Microsoft into legal trouble in the U.S. starting more than a decade ago (remember Bill Gates' video deposition in *U.S. v. Microsoft*?) and in Europe since 1998.

It took European authorities six years to conclude that Microsoft's lock-in tactics were anticompetitive and decide on those sanctions in 2004. And it has taken the years since then to complete an appeal. That's why three-year-old news is in the headlines now.

But for IT people, lock-in is even older news, dating back to the days when IBM tried to keep customers from using any card-sorting machines except its own. The biggest vendors run into antitrust trouble because they're monopolies, but practically all IT vendors will lock in customers if they can. Their goal: to keep those customer dollars coming in by making it too expensive for the customer to change vendors.

We all know that. If we're smart, we always take the risks of vendor lock-in into account when we pick products for our IT projects.

But when was the last time you thought about the ways you and your IT staff lock yourselves in?

After all, we don't just select products and technologies based on what the business needs — or what vendors force us into. We also choose them because of what we're good at. We want to leverage the expertise we have, whether that's with development tools, scripting languages or product idiosyncrasies.

■ When we lock ourselves in, we're captives of our comfort zone. And that can become a recipe for obsolescence.

We also like what's familiar: user interfaces, patching processes, vendor support procedures. We don't want to change the habits that make us more productive.

And we want what we trust, rightly or wrongly, whether that means a specific technology or vendor, or even a particular salesman who has never steered us wrong.

Trust, familiarity and expertise aren't bad guides for selecting IT — unless they start to lock us in.

When a vendor locks us in, we're prisoners of its prices and features. We're stuck with what we're offered, forced to move in lock step with the vendor's product plans.

But when we lock ourselves in, we're captives of our comfort zone. And that can be more insidious. We may limit what we'll even look at just because it's not like what we've always done. When it comes to business technology, that's a recipe for obsolescence.

Besides, we're not paid to be comfortable.

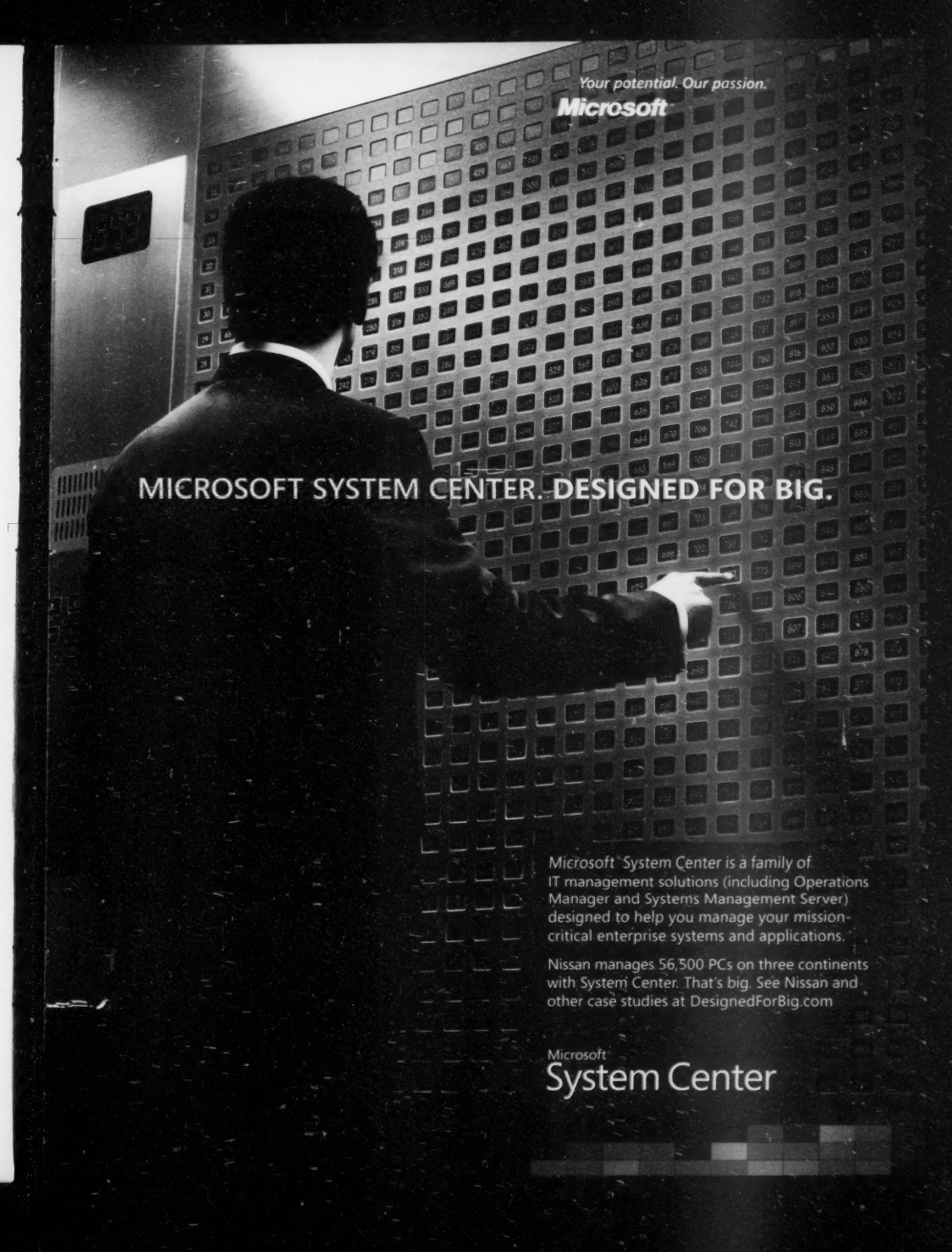
So don't be. Watch out for internal lock-in, just as you do for vendor lock-in. Keep a sharp ear out for "We can't," "We don't know how," and "What the heck is that?" They're warning signals of an IT shop that's falling into a comfortable rut.

But don't just watch. Learn. Encourage your staff to play with new technology, kick the tires of new products, and experiment with new approaches. Recognize them for dabbling. Reward them for mastery. When they explore, they stay fresh — and you stay flexible.

That means you'll be better able to offer IT options to your business users — options based on what they need, not on what you're unable to do.

And that's a goal worth locking into. ■

Frank Hayes *is* Computerworld's *senior news columnist. Contact him at frank_hayes@computerworld.com.*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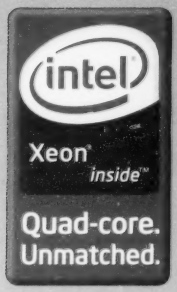

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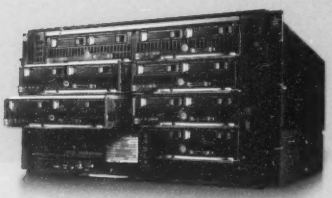

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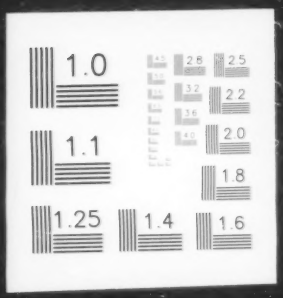
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